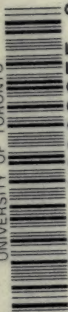


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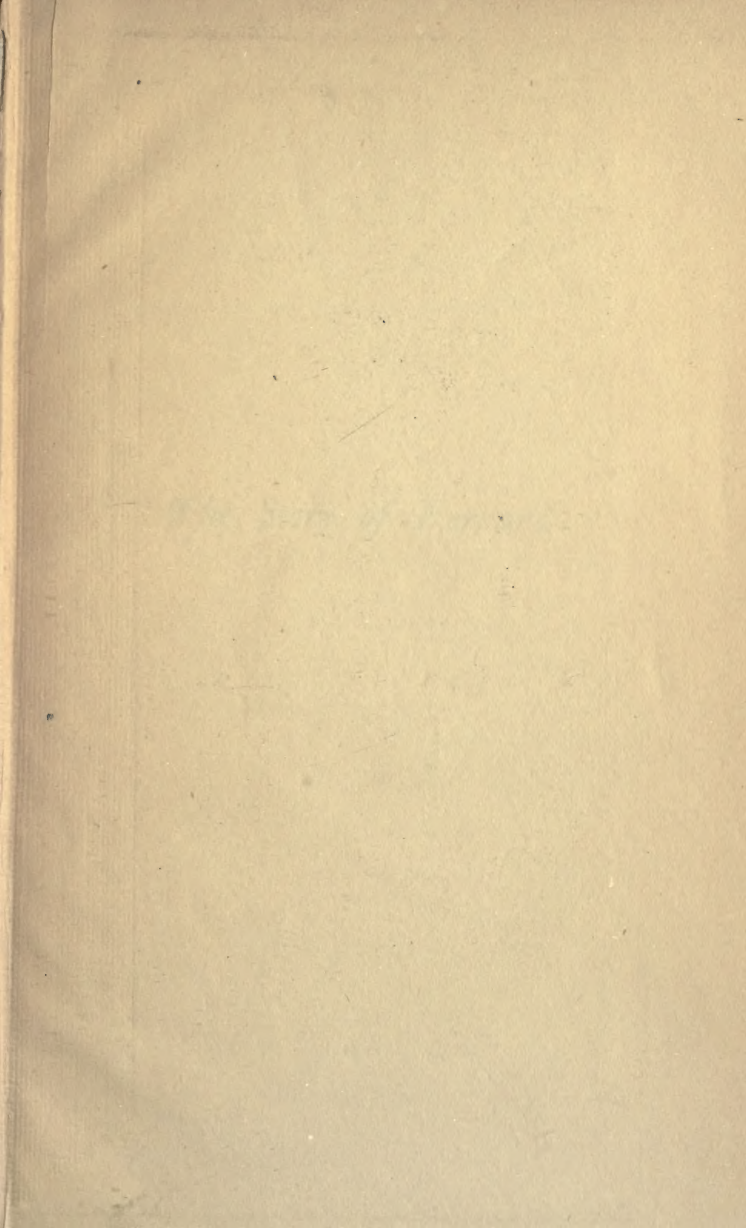
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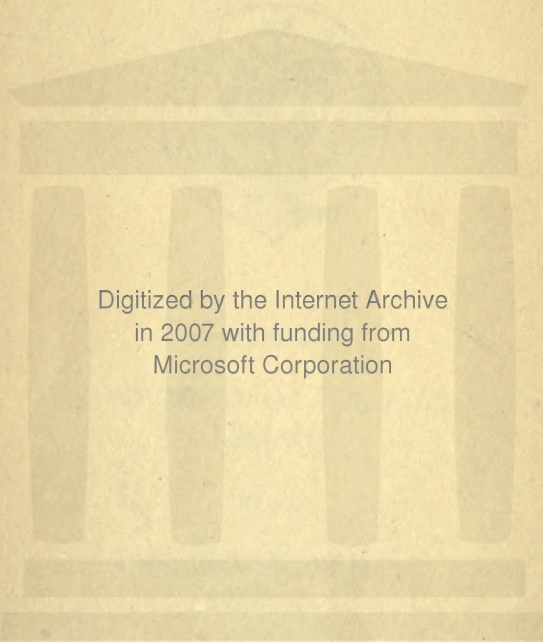
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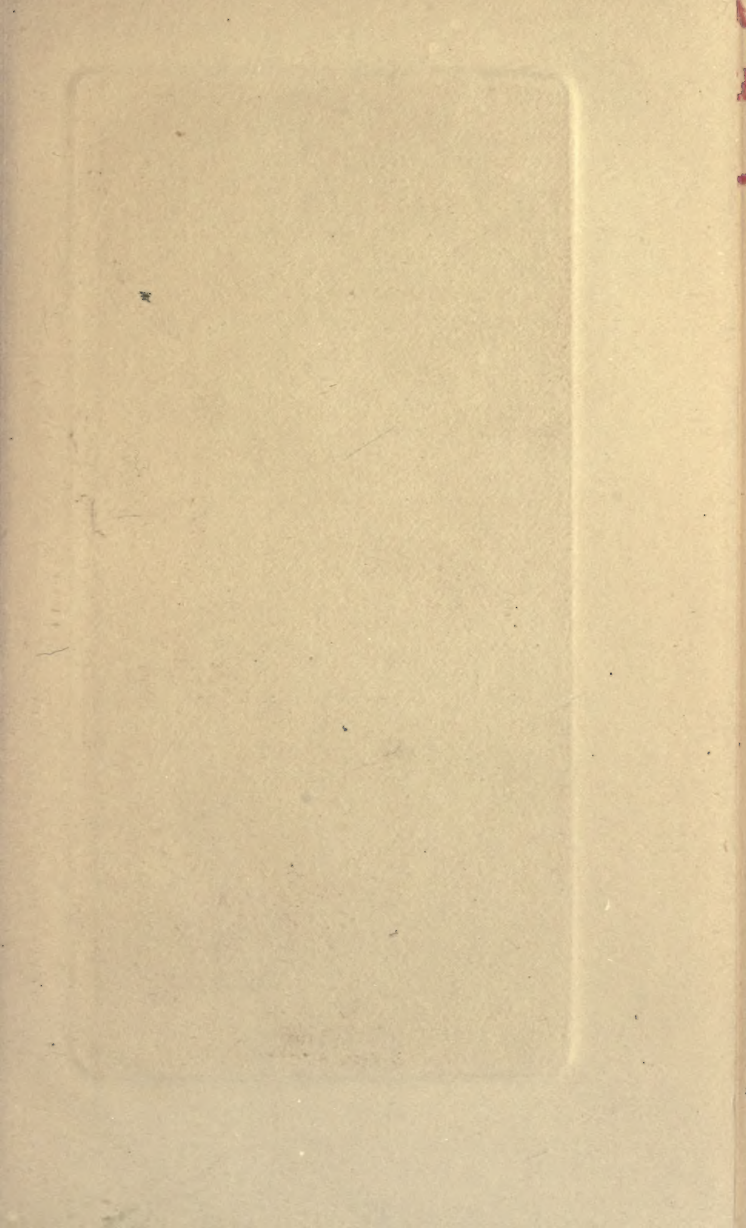


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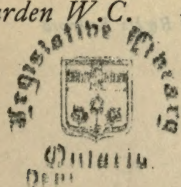
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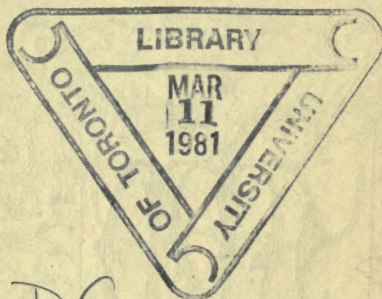


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“ La bella terra che siede sul fiume,  
Dove chiamò con lacrimoso plettro  
Febo il figliuol ch' avea mal retto il lume.”

ARIOSTO.—*Orlando Furioso*, III.

“ Come, o Ferrara, bello ne la splendida ora d'Aprile  
ama il memore sole tua solitaria pace !”

CARDUCCI.—*Alla Città di Ferrara*.



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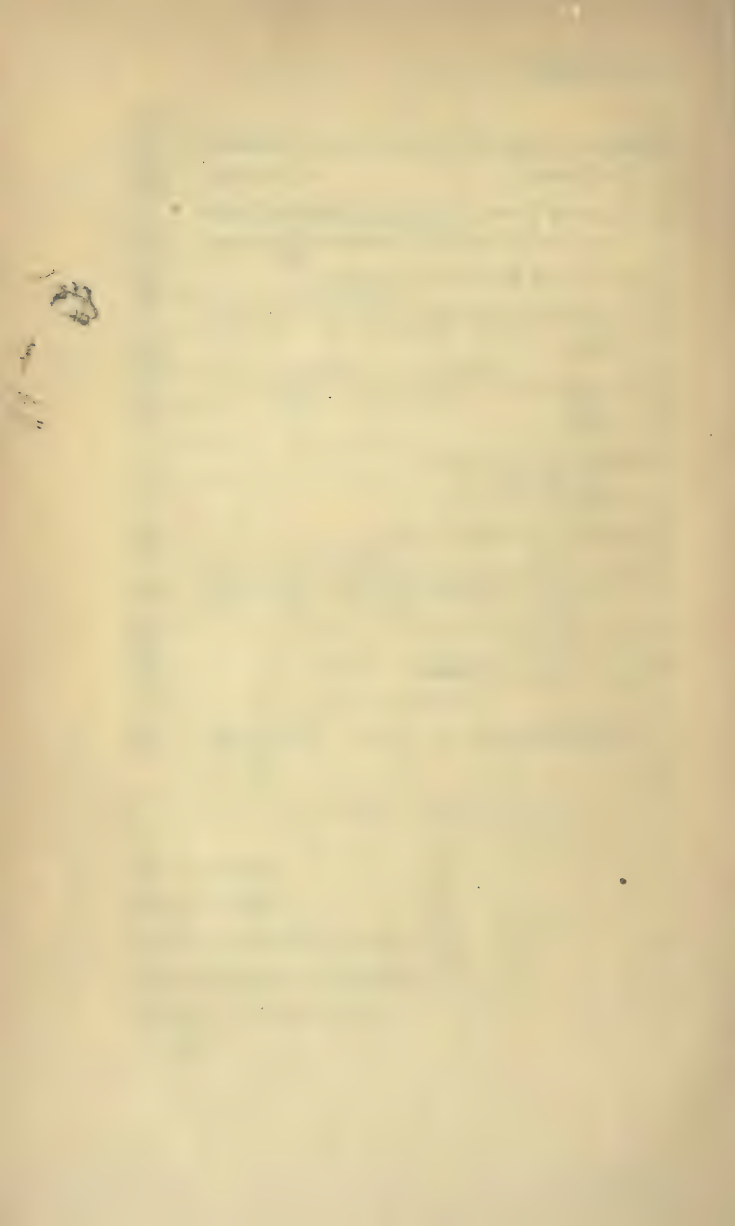
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## PREFACE

FERRARA—a city once seldom left out by those making the “grand tour”—has of late to a great extent lost its place in the traveller’s itinerary. Its low situation in the river plain and its reputation for being unhealthy scare away visitors. Forty or fifty years ago there was some reason for this avoidance, but since then drastic reforms—damaging to picturesqueness—have been made, and like all places that have taken late to hygienic ways, it has done so thoroughly. The “acqua morta,” which used to lie between the Castle and the part now occupied by the station, was long ago drained away and for miles around all the morasses have been reclaimed, a work still proceeding in more distant parts of the province. The drinking water, once a great difficulty, is now supplied from Castel Franco, near Modena, and is of purest quality. The size of the city, in which a population of 40,000 occupy a space large enough and to spare for 100,000, makes for health, and the death rate is low. My own experience and that of my sister is of perfect health during a stay twice over for many weeks together, once well into the summer, opposite the Castle and that “stagnant” moat which horrifies the casual visitor and which is in reality flowing water, and is constantly cleaned out. The place is cold in winter, when the glacial breath of the far-off Alps comes

## Preface

across the plain. In November it suffers somewhat from fogs, though in fine weather the sunset effects are gorgeous. But May is the month of all others for Ferrara. Then nothing could be more delicious than the atmosphere—clear, radiant, limpid, sweet with the odour of roses and loud with the song of nightingales. It is at that time of year that this “città di silenzio,” as the poet calls it—with its enchantment of colour, its echoes of music and romance, its singular grace and air of old forgotten pride—is seen at its best, set like a jewel in the immensity of the green plain. To pass it by is to forego a delightful sensation.

A day will just allow for a glimpse of the Cathedral, the Castle, Schifanoia, the Palazzo de' Diamanti, Picture Gallery and Via degli Angeli (renamed Corso Vittorio Emanuele), but a much longer stay is necessary for a true appreciation of the place. It is also a great pity to neglect a chance of visiting Pomposa. The hotels—the Stella d'Oro and the Europa—both Italian, are clean and comfortable, and the cooking excellent.

I have to thank Cavaliere Droghetti, Director of the Pinacoteca, for permission to visit the gallery at will, and for his sympathy with my sister and me in our work; also the librarian, Professor Agnelli, for the use of the library, for the generous loan of books, and for much kind help in various ways. Everywhere in the city, the inhabitants of which are noted for being “simpaticissimi,” we met with kindness.

For my information I have gone chiefly to Muratori and the chronicles published by him and to Frizzi's *Memorie per la Storia di Ferrara*. I have also largely used the works of more recent writers, especially of Signori Carducci, Fontana, Gregorovius, Solerti, Venturi, Villari and M. Gruyer, besides consulting those of Signori Agnelli, Bertoni, Campanini,



## Preface

Campori, Cappelli, Castagnoli, L. N. Cittadella, Gandini, Luzio, Renier and others. But the mass of literature to do with Ferrara is very great, and I can only regret my inadequate acquaintance with a great and important subject. I have been unfortunate in not having been able to take advantage of the learning and research in Mr. E. G. Gardner's delightful work, *Dukes and Poets in Ferrara*, which did not appear till this volume was in the hands of the printers.

The translations of passages from the *Divina Commedia* used are from the respective renderings of Messrs. Carlyle, Okey and Wicksteed in the Temple Classics.

E. N.

THE COTTAGE,  
UPTON LOVEL, WILTSHIRE,  
25<sup>th</sup> July 1904.



# The Story of Ferrara

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## CHAPTER I

### *The Rise of the City*

“Salve, Ferrara, co’l tuo fato in pugno

Ultima nata, creatura nova

De l’Apennin, del Po, del faticoso dolore umano !”

CARDUCCI. — *Alla Città di Ferrara.*

NO memory of a classic past dignifies Ferrara. Her early history is a slow emergence out of swamp and flood, in the midst of the inchoate region formed by the soil-laden Po, as it languidly sought the eastern shore “per aver pace coi seguaci suoi.” Over the obscurity which veils her birth legend casts a thousand gleams. The wastes of *Eridano*, as the ancients named the Po, were the haunt of fable and mystery. No roads could cross the unstable sands, and the imagination of the rare traveller, whom the boatmen guided through the labyrinthine channels, had time to follow the mocking mirage into an ocean of dreams. Here, in the Golden Age of the world, we are told, Phaeton, rashly guiding the chariot of the sun, was struck by Jove’s lightning and plunged downwards to his destruction, and where he fell a black morass opened, breathing forth such mortal vapours that

## The Story of Ferrara

birds flying over fell dead, and all beasts forsook its shores. Ever after heavy darkness brooded there; no sound was heard save the weeping of Phaeton's sisters, the Eliadi, changed by the pitying gods into amber-shedding poplars, and the musical lament of his friend Cicno, King of the Ligurians, as he circled overhead, transformed by grief into a wild swan. As one gazes from the deserted walls of the city to-day over the wide, melancholy land, this legend returns to one's mind. The marshes are now fertile fields, and swans cry over them no more, but the poplars are still there, shaking tears from their yellow tresses in autumn, and the mists creep up often and quench the rays of the sun.

The submerged Phaeton is succeeded by other strange figures of the chroniclers' imaginings—a son of Noah floated hither on some later Flood; Trojan heroes stranded amid the sands; a mysterious maiden, foundress of the city, who was called Ferrara, a simple explanation of the origin of the name, but one not accepted by the learned. When we come to historic times, ages elapse before there is any certain indication of the city's existence, though we catch elusive glimpses of peoples that pass and disappear—Ligurians, Etruscans, Celts, Romans—like waves of the sea following and breaking over one another. We seem to hear the ringing of the bells of lost and forgotten cities, over which the shifting sands have closed. Here and there a town has survived out of that dim time. As the Roman civilisation advances, cities begin to rise about the great morass. Boccaccio and later writers have identified Ferrara with the Forum Alienum of this period, the scene of a great victory of the rebel Vespasian's army over the legions of Vitellus in the year 69 A.D. On examination, however, Forum Alienum flies from us like an *ignis*



CITY WALLS.





## *The Rise of the City*

*fatuus*, to reappear in some distant part of the phantasmagoric waste, and close darkness still shrouds the Ferrarese "agro."

The early centuries of our era find the Roman cities vanished or dwindled to mere villages. Countless myriads of sea birds, leeches and fish inhabit the region. A few fisherman dwell upon the "dossi," islands of mud which lift themselves out of the waters, covered with a thick woof of roots and reeds, and by laboriously-made paths across the swamps herdsmen bring their cattle to pasture on the scant herbage. It is the age of a new wandering of the nations, and fresh tides of humanity flow over Italy—Huns, Vandals, Goths. The remnants of the populations from the ruined cities of Venetia come flying hither, to find safety amid the undesirable wastes, bringing with them the traditions of their ancient culture and civilisation. They settle wherever they can find foothold, and continue the work of redemption already begun by the scanty inhabitants. By slow and patient labour the surrounding desolation is won to cultivation; oxen draw the plough over the grave of Phaeton; King Cino is driven to utter his laments farther and farther away; the Eliadi become domestic poplars, and their tears of amber fertilising dew, as the solid earth of reality creeps little by little upon the mirage-haunted plain. The old Roman law and custom holds sway over the new communities. For centuries the process goes quietly on, unnoticed and unrecorded, within the safeguarding girdle of wilderness. Cities grow and flourish and make history in other parts of the great river plain, but it is not till the seventh century that Ferrara lifts tower and campanile over the watery levels upon our sight, late in time, but still, like her elder sisters of the Emilia, a child of the old Italian civilisation. Unlike them, she

## *The Story of Ferrara*

rises "with the cross in her hand," for she is Christian born.

When first descried in history, Ferrara is seated upon the right bank of the main stream of the Po, just above its division into two great branches, the Primaro and the Volano. This spot which rose slightly above the general level, out of reach of flood, had early attracted settlers, and some remains of Roman habitation have been found here. The poor suburb of St. Giorgio is all that is now left of this early Ferrara, which from her proud position, commanding the great river along which passed all the commerce between the ports on the seacoast and the great cities inland, was truly the "*Donna del Po*," as Tasso called her long afterwards. Wealth flowed to her upon the stream, and at one time she almost rivalled Venice in commercial prosperity. But the city has now long lost the sovereignty of the capricious river. Some time in the twelfth century a gigantic breach took place in the banks at Ficarolo, a few miles above Ferrara, cut, according to a chronicler, by the people of a small hamlet in order to submerge a hated neighbour community. The Ferrarese, he says, toiled ceaselessly for two years to close it, but in vain; the water, pouring through the outlet, made a new bed, and in course of time this channel, long known as the *Rotta di Ficarolo*, became the main river as it is to this day, gradually drawing off the streams which once filled the old course. But the *Po di Ferrara* continued to be navigable for several centuries and to take an important part in the life of the city. It was both her friend and foe; a defence in time of war, when the floods could be let loose upon an invader; but a constant rebel, bringing destruction upon fields and dwellings. Behind all the more striking events in Ferrara, one is ever aware of the struggle going on with the great



## *The Rise of the City*

river, the unceasing labour of raising and repairing the barriers against its overflow, the patient efforts of generation after generation to keep the giant imprisoned, and convert its strength to their service. But the bed gradually dried up; the water shrank into narrow streams gliding between wide strands of mud, till it became a mere ornamental highway for the princes of the Cinquecento in their gilded bucentaurs. In the sixteenth century the Bolognese were allowed to introduce into it the impetuous Reno, laden with detritus torn from the Apennines, which in time choked up the remaining channels. In the present day a narrow canal, sunk between deep banks, carries all that is left of the once majestic Po di Ferrara, and its Lady sits now high and dry above the waterfloods, far removed from the great currents of life.

The first historical notices of Ferrara are scant and vague, but she is already of some importance, and the seat of a bishopric. The first cathedral stood on the site of the present church of St. Giorgio, and was no doubt dedicated to the same saint, whom the people had chosen from the first as their protector. St. Giorgio is the most conspicuous figure in the city to this day. At every turn, on church and palace, one is met by this gracious vision of chivalry doing battle with the symbolic monster in defence of womanhood. How or when he found his way, from the eastern home of his legend to the "paludi" of the Po, I do not know, nor why he favours seafaring people in particular, such as the English, and such as the Ferrarese once were. No nation could set up a nobler ideal before their eyes. St. Giorgio is especially appropriate to this city, which was to be the home of chivalrous custom and the birthplace in far-off days of the Italian epic of chivalry.

With the rest of the Emilia and the Romagna

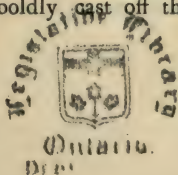
## *The Story of Ferrara*

Ferrara made part of the Exarchate of Ravenna, and in the eighth century she fell into the hands of the Lombard conquerors of the old ecclesiastical province. The Lombards were followed by the Franks, and after a stormy period, during which the city was tossed between the old and new invaders, she passed with the rest of the Exarchate under the nominal dominion of the Roman Church, as a part of the alleged Donation of Pepin. The city was now become the capital of a Duchy, according to the Lombard system of administration, and her bishops began to have great weight in ecclesiastical councils. She had a considerable commerce and was continually winning new territory from the marshes, and absorbing the small neighbouring settlements. But the records are still meagre, and during the tenth century, amid the confusion and terror caused by the dissolution of the Carlovingian Empire, and the inroads of Saracens and Huns, she is lost sight of almost altogether, her safeguarding quicksands preserving her from the woes which were making the history of the other Italian peoples.

During this time the Ferrara of to-day was coming into existence. As the inhabitants increased, they began to build on the left bank of the river, where the spots of dry ground were more numerous, and were connected by easily fordable streams, and the new city was soon surrounded by walls. From the end of the tenth century her story proceeds with more clearness and coherence. Great figures begin to loom out upon the scenes. Tedaldo, the representative of a line of Lombard chiefs, kinsman to the new Conqueror, Otho the Great, and lord of vast territories in North Italy, held the city in fief from the Pope, and built a great stronghold on the banks of the Po, called by his name, Castel Tedaldo. His son Bonifazio, Marquis of Tuscany, succeeded him. A still more famous character

## *The Rise of the City*

followed Bonifazio, his daughter, the great Countess Matilda. Ferrara claims, on very unsubstantial grounds, the honour of giving this heroine birth. But the city proved a rebellious vassal, refusing to admit the right of a woman to hold a fief. This objection was only a pretext, and it was the overthrow of feudal government which the people really aimed at. A new desire for freedom had arisen at this time among the "nations" of North Italy. They were become aware of their past and of their rights as heirs of the old civilisation of their country. This spirit was encouraged by the chaotic conditions of the general government; the supreme authority was disputed between a Church so weakened by corruption that it was incapable of supporting its claims, and foreign princes whose energy was counterbalanced by long absences from the sphere of action. The ambitions of the great local barons were checked by mutual jealousy and hate, and the cities, finding no protection in their liege lords from the attacks of the Saracens and Huns, had been forced by the necessity of defending themselves to learn the use of arms, and the habit of self-dependence and self-respect. So now, instead of nerveless bodies of timid citizens, fit only to slave for their warrior lords, the feudal order of things unexpectedly confronted a new and mighty power, the free Italian Commune. The people of Ferrara were already stirred by the movement, as they had shown in the uneasiness with which they had borne the yoke of Bonifazio. The great Marquis had been too much occupied with the far-reaching affairs of war and politics to concern himself greatly with this particular part of his vast dominions, and had interfered little with the government of the city. With virtual independence grew hatred of nominal subjection. In 1055 the citizens had boldly cast off their allegiance to



Bonifazio and the Church, and accepted the protection of the Emperor Henry III., who, as he passed across the morasses of the Po on his way to Mantua, had paused to grant them a diploma of privileges, in which, for the first time, they were recognised as the People of Ferrara and a self-governing body.

But in this very attainment of independence lay the seeds of future discord and overthrow for the new Commune. For now the lesser barons of the neighbourhood began to transfer themselves to the city, which they were no longer able to overawe or scorn; and while the addition of their territories swelled her importance, their pride and restless ambition brought a new danger within the walls. Very soon there are indications of certain families ranging themselves in opposite parties, in correspondence with the great quarrel between Church and Empire, which had now absorbed all the minor feuds of the country, foreshadowing the Guelf and Ghibelline trouble of later days, and from this time forward the city was divided into hostile quarters, fortified with grim towers, and her streets were disturbed with the new trouble of civil strife.

The once feeble Ferrara struggling amid the swamps was by this time become a city of palaces, churches and towers, and it was a strong industrial community, enriched by the agriculture and commerce which they had created for themselves, and owning a fleet of ships which bore the merchandise from the East up the great waterways of the Po, that now faced the imperious Matilda, and denied her allegiance. The lady, engaged in "exalting her petticoat over sceptres and crowns," was compelled awhile, by misfortunes and defeats in other parts, to forego her claims upon Ferrara. But in 1101, when her bitter enemy Henry IV. had been driven back to Germany, and one by one the rebellious states of Lombardy had succumbed



## *The Rise of the City*

before her, she collected a great army, and backed by Venice and Ravenna, both jealous of the maritime prosperity of their neighbour, marched onwards to Ferrara. The city, vulnerable only by water, was compelled, by the fleets of the two sea powers, to surrender and do homage to the Princess. Beyond exacting her feudal dues, however, Matilda did not interfere with the internal government, now fixed by long usage in the hands of the people. Civic liberty was left to them. The worst consequence of their defeat was the chance it gave to Venice of crippling the flourishing city, whose commerce bid fair to rival her own. The Republic, besides exacting commercial privileges, established the right to set up an independent tribunal in Ferrara for Venetian subjects settled there. This was presided over by an officer of the Republic called the Visdomino, whose powers and privileges often proved extremely troublesome to the rulers of the city.

At the death of Matilda in 1115, Ferrara was included in her famous legacy to the Holy See, and this new link bound the city more closely to Rome and drew her later into the political whirlpool caused by the struggle between Emperor and Pope for Matilda's inheritance. But for a little while her would-be masters were occupied in tearing at each other's throats, and left in peace, she quietly took the opportunity of assuming the whole direction of her own affairs. Her citizens were regularly trained to warfare, and like a sovereign state, she sent forth her armies to fight in the petty wars for ever going on between her neighbour cities. But she had no energetic quarrels of her own; the people were absorbed in commerce, and somewhat dulled by increasing wealth and luxury. The restlessness of their Italian blood spent itself in internal feuds, and the worst foes of the city's peace were within the gates.

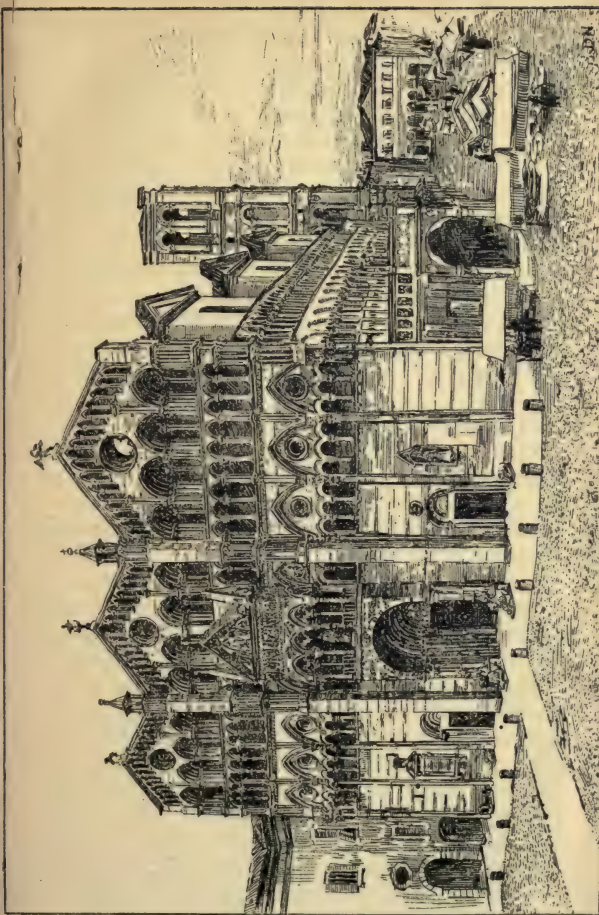
## *The Story of Ferrara*

The great Guelf and Ghibelline parties were now beginning to shape themselves definitely out of the confusion of strife between Papacy and Empire, and the whole country was divided against itself by opposite allegiances. The families that about this time rise into view out of the level of burgher insignificance appear already ranged one against the other. For the Guelf or Papal faction stood the Adelardi, the most honourable of all the citizens, lords of vast lands and wealth. They were confronted by the Torelli, a name which suits the stout champions they were to become of Barbarossa and the second Frederick. These two Houses seemed to have held, in turn, the office of Consul or Captain of the People, the highest position in the Commune.

Another name, honoured in the city at this time, and greater than either of the other two, the most famous indeed in all Italian story, arrests our attention, Aldighieri, or Alighieri. For from Ferrara, Dante drew a portion of his blood, and perhaps from that far-off motherland some of his poetic spirit. His ancestor, Cacciaguida, married a lady of Ferrara, Madonna Aleghiera, whose name, through her son Alighiero, became the patronymic of the family :—

“Mia donna venne a me di Val di Pado  
E quindi il soprannome tuo si feo.”

The memory of the Adelardi is enshrined in the Duomo of Ferrara which was built by them. At the beginning of the twelfth century the city had practically transferred itself to the left bank of the river, far from the old Cathedral, and Guglielmo, the chief of the Adelardi, fired by the enthusiasm mingled of religious fervour and love of building, which was inspiring the wealthy citizens of the Italian Commune to raise up



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magnificent monuments of architecture to the glory of God, and their own enduring fame, devoted much of his great wealth to a new cathedral. Long before it was finished he died, leaving his brother and son to continue the work. Meanwhile trouble had fallen upon the city. The old claims of the Empire over Italy, which had now been in abeyance for so long that they were almost forgotten, were suddenly revived by the descent of the young Barbarossa. He called upon the Communes to fulfil their feudal obligations, and Ferrara was reminded of the famous diploma which she had accepted from Henry III., thus acknowledging him as her feudal lord. But the citizens, trusting in the protection of their marshes, quietly disregarded the Emperor's demand for the restitution of the legal rights which they had appropriated, till one day the sound of the Imperial trumpets was borne across the stagnant waters, and the German troops emerged triumphantly from the morasses and stood at the gates. Resistance was useless; the city submitted at once, and did homage to Frederick; and in 1162, when the tale reached them of the razing of fair Milan with her hundred towers by the implacable conqueror, Ferrara, like the rest of the North Italian cities, was humbled by fear into accepting a Consul of the Emperor's choosing and enduring the rule of a foreign governor. But the oppression of Barbarossa and his Ministers soon woke the courage of despair in the cities, and embarrassed by a rebellion in the Trevisano in 1164, the Emperor was compelled to beg troops and provisions from Ferrara, in return for which the city exacted the privilege of electing her own Consul, with full powers of jurisdiction. She also won from Frederick the royal prerogative of coining money.

The Commune appears to have used its recovered liberty to nobler purpose than to wrest profit out of



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its neighbours' misfortunes. The idea of a free Italian nation had spread from Lombardy across the languid waters of the great delta, and Ferrara on her mud banks warmed into zeal for the common cause. In 1167 the cloister of a convent near Bergamo was the scene of a meeting fraught with mighty consequences. Deputies from Milan, Cremona, Bergamo, Brescia, Mantua and Ferrara met there secretly, and, resolving that it was better to die than to live in misery and shame, concluded an alliance against the Imperial tyranny in the names of their several Communes. Out of this small beginning sprang the great Lombard League, and Frederick found his will confronted by an adversary worthy of it. The League grew rapidly to vast proportions, and later on the chiefs and elders of the many cities which it now embraced met together in solemn congress, and swore in their own names and those of their fellow-citizens to defend their liberty and rights, and to wage war against Frederick and all his race, making no truce without the common consent.

Ferrara now rejoiced in a dignity which was to endure but a short time. She was free. The yoke of the Emperor was shaken off, and the Pope contented himself with her formal homage and gladly accepted her voluntary alliance against the common enemy. It is true that after this she bowed herself from time to time before a passing Emperor, and took upon herself obligations in return for privileges, for a belief in certain legal rights vested in the Emperor was constant in Italy during the Middle Ages. But these dealings were more or less courtesies, and in no way interfered with the government of the city, which was wholly in the hands of the Commune. The chief magistrate was elected by the citizens and was known by various titles—Consul, Captain of the People, and

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afterwards, when it became the custom for the sake of avoiding civil strife to chose one from another "nation," he was called Podestà. He was assisted by two Councils, a greater and a lesser. To the last, composed of the most powerful nobles and citizens, was committed the real conduct of affairs. The ultimate decision of all important questions rested with the people themselves, who at the sound of the great bell were accustomed to run together in the Piazza and give their judgment upon the proposals of the Councils. This popular fashion of government endured long after it had become an empty form and all real power had been usurped by one princely House; and the lesser Council, which developed into the Council of the Savi, or Wise Men, and became limited to twelve members, with a chief Minister, called the Guidice de' Savi, at its head, continued to exist under the Marquises and Dukes of Ferrara, as the chief instrument of their government.

But before the twelfth century had passed away the freedom of the city was on the wane. The election of the Governor was decided by the preponderating influence of one or other of the great families, especially the Adelardi and the Torelli, and the general prosperity was crossed by their mutual hate and jealousy, which watered the streets with blood. In the second Guglielmo Adelardi, however, the son of the founder of the Cathedral, the city had a noble ruler and patriot, if we may believe the chroniclers, and, under his leadership, she nobly fulfilled her duty to the national cause. In 1174 the Imperial forces, supported by a Venetian fleet, were besieging the city of Ancona. News reached Ferrara that the defenders were in sore straits. Guglielmo hastened to raise an army for their relief, pledging his lands and goods to pay the cost, and, joined by the Roman Contessa Aldruda, Lady of

Bertinoro, one of the heroines of that age of strong men and women, at the head of her vassals, he marched towards Ancona with 2400 picked troops. Ent camping on a mountain near by, Guglielmo ordered the soldiers to light torches and fix them to their lances, in order to terrify the enemy, and under the flames sweeping in the wind he stood and exhorted them to courage in the morrow's battle. After him spoke the stout-hearted Lady Aldruda, and her words so rejoiced the soldiers that they shouted and sang and "made sweetest choirs." But their work was already done. The besiegers, supposing a great host had stolen upon them, raised their camp and fled, and the Venetians, when they saw their allies gone, quickly hoisted sail and slipped out to sea. Thus, according to a chronicler, the hosts of the great Barbarossa melted before a phantom terror and Ancona was saved. Guglielmo returned to Ferrara in triumph, loaded with the gifts and gratitude of the rescued city, and applauded to the skies by all Lombardy.

Though this may be an imaginative description of how it came to pass, the relief of Ancona was a severe check to the Emperor, and it was followed by another in the relief of Alessandria in 1175, in which Ferrara took part with the other cities of the League. She also helped to deliver the final blow a year later at Legnano, that Marathon of the Lombard cities as it has been called. And on the Sunday of the Passion the citizens watched a pompous procession of galleys approach upon their streams, bearing Pope Alexander III., who came to arrange here the preliminaries of the great meeting with Barbarossa at Venice, where Guelf legends represent him with his foot planted on the neck of the prostrate tyrant.

The death of Guglielmo Adelardi in 1183 was a portentous event for Ferrara. Her era of freedom was

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hearing its end. The great chief had no children, and the heir of the family's vast possessions and influence was his brother's baby daughter Marchesella. The old writers relate that Guglielmo on his death-bed, desiring to secure peace for his city, betrothed the little child to one of the rival house of the Torelli, and committed her to their guardianship. But the great Guelf House of Este, from its strongholds in the Paduan hills, had long looked with covetous eyes upon the rich city which hovered like a bubble over the marshes far away to the south. The Estensi were united with the Adelardi by political friendship, and their chief Obizzo was resolved that the great heritage should not fall into the hands of the opposite party. Like the eagle whose image he bore on his shield, he swept down and carried off the maiden out of the grasp of the Torelli to be the bride of his own successor. Modern Dryasdusts have, however, thrown doubt upon the whole story of Guglielmo's will and this picturesque rape, which makes so dramatic an opening for the long career of crime and glory which la Casa d'Este was to pursue in Ferrara; and the means by which these powerful princes established themselves there are wrapped in obscurity. Marchesella died in childhood, and certain it is that the Marquis Obizzo possessed himself of the Adelardi states and influence, bringing, instead of the peace dreamed of by the dying Guglielmo, a sword which was to rend the city for thirty weary years.

As soon as the Estensi had established themselves in the city, the Torelli sprang to arms against them, and the old faction hatreds burnt more fiercely than before. The citizens ranged themselves on the two sides, and under cover of Guelf and Ghibelline sympathies vented their private spites upon one another. Outside the walls the conflict was repeating itself on



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the larger field of all North Italy. Now that the Emperor was overcome the Guelf cities hastened to wreak vengeance on those that had supported him. Moreover, the need of union had passed away with the common foe, and the bond of the Lombard League was loosened; hate and jealousy parted the Communes, and the whole country seethed with quarrels. The two great chiefs, Salinguerra Torelli and Azzolino d'Este, successor of the Marquis Obizzo, were leaders of their respective parties over the whole arena of strife, and Ferrara, as the special object of their rivalry, became one of the scenes of hottest struggle. The city was the prize now of one, now of the other, as each in turn came at the head of his partisans and drove the other out with fire and bloodshed. In the confusion all order was relaxed; the quieter citizens had no voice in the government, which was tossed about between the factions, while commerce, agriculture and the peaceful crafts which had enriched the city began to decay. Sickiness, famine, and all the hideous crimes which wait upon civil strife, added to the general woe, and the once fair and prosperous city became one of the darkest spots in the vast scene of bloodshed, cruelty, treachery and oppression which the country presented, and which was lighted only by the rare flashes of extraordinary virtues, such as are kindled in the midst of evil itself.

This thirteenth century, the time when "men's souls came to the surface," shows strange human contrasts. Over there, on the Umbrian plain, Charity walked abroad in the emaciated frame of Francesco Bernadone, smiling upon the whole world, while from the hills of the Trevisano Ecelino da Romano, the embodiment of Hate, descended upon Italy. In these two vessels appointed, the one unto joy, the other unto wrath, the human will surely reached its highest expression. The



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immoderate spirit which they typify at opposite extremes is manifest everywhere in the story of this time. Tears follow close upon rage. The kiss of peace is succeeded by the blow of treachery. In Ferrara the spilling of blood was arrested for a brief space in 1107 by the voice of one Fra Alberto da Mantua preaching from the pulpit of the Duomo, which filled the people with such enthusiasm of brotherly kindness that forty-five families divided by blood feuds fell upon each other's necks and made peace. The great adversaries Azzolino and Salinguerra themselves clasped hands. Yet only a moment before Azzolino was drawing a secret dagger upon Salinguerra's ally, Ecelino (father of him who is called the Cruel), the chief of the opposite party, as they walked together in apparent friendship upon the Piazza of St. Marco. A year or two later the new Emperor, Otho IV., appeared in Italy, and the Marquis d'Este and the same Ecelino, with Salinguerra and leaders of both factions, hastened to salute the monarch and lay their mutual grievances before him. They rode out with him one day, Azzolino on one side of his horse, Ecelino on the other, and he bade the two be reconciled. "Sire Ycelin, salutem li Marches." Ecelino, uncovering his head and inclining himself, said: "Domine Marchio, Deus salvet vos." Otho then turned to the Marquis: "Sire Marches, salutem Ycelin," and Azzolino, retaining his cap in token of his higher rank, pronounced the same words: "Deus salvet vos." Presently falling behind the Emperor in a narrow pass, the pair fell into talk, and grew so absorbed that Otho's suspicion was roused and he turned and bade them tell of what they spoke. Whereat they answered: "We speak of the days of our childhood, for now are we returned to our early friendship." They had been brought up together as boys, and Ecelino had married

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the Marquis's sister Agnese. But no ties or momentary kindness could soften their hostility for long, and they were soon tearing once more at each other's throats.

Meanwhile

" . . . Ferrara lay in rueful case,  
The lady-city, for whose sole embrace  
Her pair of suitors struggled." . . .

"The thoroughfares were overrun with weed,  
Docks, quitch grass, loathly mallows no man plants."

Her wealth was rapidly vanishing, in the ravages and spoilings of now one party, now the other. Freedom was become a mere name; whichever chief happened to be uppermost for the time usurped the power without heed to the popular voice. These natural Gueft sympathies of the people inclined them towards the Marquis d'Este, who represented their traditional allegiance to the Holy See, and who was personally beloved. At last in 1208, in the hope of closing the miserable strife, they took a step of far-reaching consequence to the city, solemnly electing the Marquis and his heirs perpetual lords of Ferrara, and surrendering to them all their rights and privileges as a free Commune. This is the first instance of an Italian city deliberately laying down her freedom at the feet of a tyrant.

But the repose which the unhappy people sought was denied many years yet. Again and again Salinguerra returned and drove out Azzolino, or the Podestà whom he set up. At length the Marquis, after a last encounter with his old foe, Ecelino, in which he was worsted, fell sick and died in Verona. His son, Aldobrandino, took up his sword and wielded it with new vigour against Salinguerra and the whole Imperial party, even pledging the person of his young

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crother, Azzo Novello, with the Florentine merchants to raise money. The endless tale continues, castles besieged and sacked, cities plundered, first by one party then by the other, noble heads struck off in the public piazzas, wasted fields and homesteads, starving peasants, fire and the sword triumphant everywhere. Old allegiances shifted and grew confused in the general upheaval of personal passions, and we find Ghibellines kneeling before Popes, and Guelfs pleading to Emperors. In 1213 a truce was made between the Marquis Aldobrandino and Salinguerra. They embraced and swore to live at peace and to rule Ferrara together. The citizens who had been banished by either party were reinstated in their homes and possessions, and the very elements of discord walked the streets hand in hand. Peace actually prevailed for a time while the fiery spirits on both sides were occupied in distant scenes of the general conflict, and the people of the city united together to carry on petty wars against Modena and Ravenna.

But the fire smouldered on and awoke to fiercer fury a few years later. The Guelfs had been crippled by the loss of the Marquis Aldobrandino, who died in 1215, while Azzo Novello, redeemed from pawn by his mother, was yet too young to act with energy. Meanwhile the whole Imperial faction had been warmed to new zeal by the rise of the second Frederick of Suabia, in whom the will of his grandfather, old Barbarossa, lived again. Salinguerra and his followers, insolent with the consciousness of fresh force behind them, had usurped all the power in Ferrara. But a fresh spirit confronted the Torelli chief in the young Marquis, as soon as he was arrived at man's estate, and a struggle of giants began between the old and the young hero, with Ferrara for prize. Once more the chief interest of the whole conflict was

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centred here, and the leaders on both sides gathered to this personal quarrel of the two champions. The flower of Guelf chivalry, impetuous and valiant knights — Count Richard of St. Boniface, husband of the famous Cunizza whom Dante places in Paradise, Tisolino di San Piero, and the like—arrayed themselves beside the young Lord of Este, while behind Salinguerra we catch sight of Ecelino the Cruel, and the impassive face of the great Frederick himself. Ferrara flamed with burning palaces and her streets were washed with blood, her fountains choked with the uncared-for dead. The Ghibellines succeeded in keeping uppermost, under their cool old leader. But one day, while he was acting as Podestà of Mantua, news reached the chief that the Guelfs were in possession of Ferrara and his adherents at bay in the Castle. Hastening thither with an army, he drove back the enemy who came forth to meet him, and pressing hard upon their heels, he entered the gate in their wake, and, pursuing them through the streets, forced them to abandon the city by another gate. They soon returned with a great host of Guelf allies, and encamped beneath the walls, and Salinguerra, uncertain of the fidelity of the citizens, began to tremble as he gazed out upon their countless pavilions. He invited the Marquis to a conference in the city, sending him a safe-conduct, and Azzo arrived, accompanied by a hundred followers. Some disturbance arose in the streets during this meeting, and Salinguerra seized the pretext to call his people to arms. They fell with fury upon the small party of Guelfs. The Marquis and a few others escaped, but many were killed and taken prisoners, among them Richard of St. Boniface, who for a long space was kept captive. The noble Tisolino di San Piero, defending himself from a



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crowd of pursuers, got free of the city and reached a villa outside ; but here he was attacked by a band of peasants, who hemmed him in and killed his charger beneath him. At last, wounded and exhausted, he looked around, and, seeing no help, resolved to surrender. But no one present was of noble blood and fit to receive the sword of a knight, and rather than dishonour himself by yielding to a vile person, Tisolino chose to die. The story of his chivalrous end moved all Italy. Salinguerra caused the body to be fetched with great honour and buried in the city—and over his grave the chroniclers note the appearance of a terrible comet, which they take as a presage of the evil days that now crowded ever thicker and thicker upon their country.

But to Ferrara there came a breathing space. Azzo, enraged by the treacherous blow and by the loss of St. Boniface, marched away to seize and burn the adversary's castles around, and put the inhabitants to the sword. But he was powerless for the time against the city, and had to watch his old foe seat himself securely in authority and rule the state undisturbed for several years, while beneath the triumphant star of Frederick II. the Guelf cause everywhere sank oppressed. The Marquis's friends in Ferrara were forced to submit to their enemies, and the banished Guelfs humbly accepted the grace offered to them by the confident ruler of restoration to their homes.

With the unwonted peace the wasted city flourished again in an amazing manner. A Ferrarese chronicler describes her happy condition. Sitting over the fire in winter time, he says, he had often heard his father tell of thirty-two towers standing in divers places in the city, which, in the struggles of Salinguerra and Azzo Novello, were levelled to the ground. But



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when the peace came, prosperity returned, and none were sent into exile save criminals and disturbers only. With all the neighbouring cities communication was open. Up the Po from the sea sailed great ships burdened with merchandise of every sort, and anchored at the Ferrarese shores. Every year were held two fairs, one on the Sunday of the Olives, the other the Feast of St. Martin, each lasting fifteen days, and to these ran together merchants from all parts of Italy and from France, and made rich commerce. So fat was the public purse that every month after the common expenses had been paid the remainder was divided among the citizens.

But beneath this fair scene, too brightly painted by a Ghibelline pen, we divine the heavy oppression which kept the weaker party quiet, and the discontent which was slowly gaining strength. Salinguerra's enemies were many, and the secret heart of the people leant always to Azzo Novello. But the splendid fame of the old warrior and the prosperity which he had given her kept the city faithful yet.

Meanwhile the cities of North Italy had composed their feuds in face of a common foe, and the grandson of Barbarossa had to reckon with the resuscitated Lombard League. Ferrara ranged herself beside her sisters of Lombardy in spite of Salinguerra. The old Ghibelline was little by little losing his hold, and the reappearance of the long-absent Azzó inspired the Guelf citizens with new courage. But the storm which seemed to approach delayed to break. The sound of battle rolled away to a distant part, and both Guelf and Ghibelline chieftain followed after it, accompanied by the fighting men of the city. In their absence Ferrara tasted once more a short-lived liberty. Her stagnant streams were disturbed only by the eternal squabbles of her fishermen and salt-gatherers

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with the boats of arrogant Venice. The heavy-laden merchant barks passed slowly up and down, unmolested by hostile fleets, and the people bought and sold, chatted and laughed, forgetful of sorrow past and yet to come.

Meanwhile the general strife was going on with increasing fury. The Emperor's two chief captains in Italy, Ecelino da Romano and his only less terrible brother Alberico were engaged in a tigerish struggle with the cities of the Trevisano, and Salinguerra was supporting them, while Azzo d'Este reinforced their foes. Hideous scenes of cruelty marked the passing of the combatants; flaming towns, whole populations slaughtered or mutilated, harvests blackened and withered, crafts and commerce oppressed, while all the evil passions of man stalked insolently under the free sky. In the very height of the dreadful tumult the voice of a Dominican brother, Fra Giovanni da Vicenza, was heard preaching peace, and there came a sudden astounding lull in the conflict. A passionate desire for reconciliation filled every heart. On a certain day in August 1233, at the bidding of the friar, Azzo, Ecelino, Salinguerra—all the great barons and knights, all the cities, Ferrara among them, that had been tearing at each other's throats a moment before, some with their banners surrounding the symbolic Car of the Commune, some headed by their bishops and priests, came hurrying on foot and on horseback to an appointed place beside the Adige close to Verona. Here at the fiery words of the preacher they threw themselves on each other's necks and wept tears of mutual pardon and love. A hundred mortal feuds were healed. The son of the Marquis d'Este, Rinaldo, was betrothed to Alberico da Romano's daughter Adalasia. And for a very short space the lion and the lamb lay down together. Salinguerra

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himself led Azzo into Ferrara, and the day of universal happiness seemed at hand. But this sudden friendship was followed by an outburst of fiercer hate than ever. The peacemaker himself, Fra Giovanni, placed by the enthusiastic Vicentines at the head of the Government, became a firebrand of war. In Ferrara the old divisions were too deep to remedy, and now that the Marquis was come back they soon broke out again. The citizens gathered round Azzo, and it was only his personal character and the glory of his deeds that maintained Salinguerra in his place. The fortunes of the Ghibelline were steadily setting. They rallied for a moment on the appearance in the city of Frederick II. himself, who held a Diet here in 1239, and to whom even Azzo and the Count of St. Boniface found it expedient to do homage, the Marquis being forced to yield his son with the young bride Adalasia as hostage to the Emperor. But the end of Salinguerra's domination was near at hand. One last triumph the tireless old warrior tasted as at the head of his Ferrarese troops and the Ghibelline forces he discomfited the Bolognese on the bloody field of Vignola. But this only whetted the rage of the avenger. Enemies gathered thickly about him. Pope Gregory IX., Venice, Bologna, each animated by some particular grievance against him, now united in a determined league with the Marquis d'Este for the uprooting of this stout support of the Empire. The octogenarian chief calmly made ready for his death-struggle. One after another the noble families abandoned the city and betook themselves to Azzo's standard; the bishop, Filippo Fontana, forsook the crosier for the sword and seized on Salinguerra's castles in the neighbourhood. But still the undismayed old man prepared his defences with stratagem and military skill. He cut the bank of the Po, and having surrounded the city

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with a vast morass, sat down to await the attack. Very soon a mighty host, marshalled by Azzo Novello, by the Papal legate Gregoris da Montelupo, by Count Richard of St. Boniface, and many other Guelf leaders, came and sat down before the walls, while a great fleet under the Doge, Giacomo Tiepolo, in person, sailed up the river to their support. For four long months the besiegers lay there, half-choked in mud, and assaulted the city with every military engine then known and with constant fierce attacks. But they were still baffled by the valour and prudence of the indomitable Salinguerra and his scanty garrison. The chronicles relate that the besiegers, wearied with their vain efforts, at last resolved on treachery, remembering how they had been themselves deceived by the old Ghibelline before. The Marquis Azzo protested, but finally consented to the plot. Many of the defenders were sick of their sufferings and secretly favoured the Guelfs, but it was Salinguerra's chief stay and lieutenant, Ugo Ramberti, who yielded to the bribes of the enemy and counselled his leader to make peace. Salinguerra declared that the Guelfs would take possession of the city and use it with the license of conquerors, but Ugo still persisted in his advice. At last the old man sighed and said : " If thou dost desire this peace, I am unable to prevent it. For the enemy are very powerful, many of the citizens secretly favour them, thou too dost fail me. Do then as seems good to thee. But it is well for thee to know that with the sword of this peace thou shall cut off thine own nose." With a heavy heart he betook himself to the hostile camp to treat with his enemies. He was received with all honour, and peace was arranged without difficulty. Then the Guelf leaders offered to accompany him on his return to the city, and the magnanimous old warrior, united to many of them by the freemasonry of chivalry,



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led them through the streets amid the joyful applause of the people and made them a royal feast in his palace of S. Pietro. But in the midst of the revelry, when all were excited with wine, up sprang Paolo Traversari, lord of Ravenna, and began to accuse the host of many crimes. Salinguerra leapt to his feet and gave him the lie. But while he tried to speak a great noise of stamping of feet and clapping of hands drowned his voice. Then he understood what it meant, and sank into his seat. They made him their prisoner and brought him to the river and set him in a Venetian ship, which carried him to Venice, where he passed his few remaining days in prison. As to Ugo Ramberti, the conquerors showed little gratitude for his services, and he was forced to fly, and, in a long and bitter exile, had time to ponder the prophetic words of his old master.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This version of Salinguerra's fall is coloured by Ghibelline partisanship. It is probable that he was compelled to surrender, without the intervention of treachery. See Antolini, *Il Dominio Estense in Ferrara*.



THE WHITE EAGLE OF ESTE.



## CHAPTER II

### *The Age of Blood*

“ . . . O aquila bianca, vieni ! ”—*Aquila.*

THE downfall of Salinguerra was the ruin of the Ghibelline cause in Ferrara. The city passed now undisputed into the power of the Guelf House, to which she had surrendered her liberties in 1208.

La Casa d'Este was of immemorial antiquity. Around its unknown origin medieval chroniclers wove their flattering tales, “gossiping” of Trojan ancestors and of Roman heroes whom they name the Atii, from Ateste, the Roman appellation of the ancient town of Este. The scholars that thronged the Court of Ferrara in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries vied in embellishing these legends with fantastic details, or in tracing the blood of their princes to that mystic source of chivalry, the Round Table. Poets chanted the heroic deeds of fabulous Estensi against Goth and Hun. But though the Italians, grateful for the fidelity of this House to the national cause throughout the Middle Ages, have loved to believe it a scion of the ancient Roman race, it is more probable that it sprang originally from a Lombard stock. It had, however, been long settled on the sunny side of the Alps before our story becomes concerned with it, and its chiefs had held far-reaching dominion as Dukes and Counts of Tuscany, and great offices under the Carlovingians and the Othos. In the tenth century Oberto was Count of

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the Sacred Palace under Otho the Great. His son, Oberto II., fought for Arduino, King of Italy, against the Emperor, thus foreshadowing the Guelf destinies of the House. The Marquis Albertazzo, grandson of the second Oberto, revived the family power, which had somewhat declined; he held vast territories and jurisdictions in the lower valley of the Po. The centre of the family and their chief seat was already the little town of Este, which stands on its antique site at the southern foot of the Euganean hills, that line of still blue waves seen on clear days from Ferrara lying far to the north-east of the great ocean of plain. The life of Albertazzo is said to have extended over the whole of the eleventh century. He was the common ancestor of the two great branches of the family known to later history. His son Guelf inherited the domains of his mother Cunegonda, a princess of the great German House of the Guelfs, and settling beyond the Alps founded the House of Brunswick, from which is descended King Edward VII. of England. The family heritage in Italy fell to the share of the younger brother Folco, and from him, through his son, the Marquis Obizzo, who, as we have seen, established his power in Ferrara, sprang the famous line which, gradually extending its sway over the neighbouring territories and cities, built up the rich and important principality of Ferrara, Modena and Reggio.

The triumph of the House of Este is the most fateful event in the whole story of Ferrara. While the two parties had been fairly matched, it had been impossible for either to completely subjugate the Commune. But now with the old Ghibelline chief and the long train of fugitives and exiles that passed away through the gates, the last chance of independence was forsaking the citizens. But the people little heeded their loss of freedom. They only desired peace. They welcomed

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Azzo Novello with shouts of joy, and suffered him to gather quietly into his hands, as the vassal of the Holy See, all the prerogatives of sovereignty which they had defended against Barbarossa and Frederick II.

The name of Este is surrounded by a glamour of romance and poetry. All that is picturesque in medieval life, that age of chivalry and song, and all the splendours of the flowering time of Italian literature and art, combine to adorn it. Ferrara owes to this House her peculiar place in history; she is remembered as the scene of its brilliant and long-lasting tyranny, of its dark deeds, and its culture of all that makes life outwardly beautiful. Her story becomes henceforth the story of her princes. Little by little they extended their domination over the social and intellectual life of the community, and moulded the whole city to their will, so that, even now, three centuries after the last of them passed out of her, she keeps the impress of it, and seems in her faded, melancholy dignity to belong to her old sovereigns still.

The natural disposition of the people inclined them to the yoke. The strength developed by the patient labour of creating a habitable world out of that amphibious region was worn out by their dreadful sufferings. They lacked the strenuous will of the Florentines, which misfortune only braced to rebel anew. Their character had something of the soft and pliable nature of the clay which their river soil yielded so abundantly for the building of the graceful habitations. No grim grey city risen slowly in stone hewn with labour and sorrow from the mountain side would ever have submitted to a master as Ferrara did. The hereditary temper of the Estensi made them her natural masters. Their love of splendour, of beauty, of poetry, was answered by a desire for brightness and joy in the people; lord and citizens owned the same steadfast

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Guelf traditions. These meant more than a State policy ; they signified the old national spirit which had passed into Ferrara from the drifting wrecks of the ancient cities out of which she had arisen. The peculiar unity and directness of purpose which the single rule of this one House gave to her course kept alive and steadily developed this spirit in politics, letters and art, till with the revival of the æsthetic life, which is Italy's true heritage from her classic past, she arrived in the "golden age" of Leonello, Borso and Ercole at her highest glory and fulfilment as "the typical city of the Renaissance."

The despotism of the Estensi was for the material well-being of Ferrara. It saved her from the state of anarchy into which free cities like Padua fell through the struggles of the great families for predominance. But all her energies were absorbed thenceforth in the service of her splendour-loving rulers, and she ceased to bring forth great citizens. Brilliant statesmen, scholars, poets, were to be written on the pages of her story, but all nurslings of the Court, bred up in the fear of the Estensi. One independent spirit only appears in later times, one deep, serious soul to balance the pleasure-seeking multitude. For it was out of this Ferrara in the gayest days of the Quattrocento that the prophet was to arise who should announce God's wrath upon the new found joy of life. Far ahead we see him, standing aloof from the palace of the prince, sad and alone ; an ominous shadow upon the brilliant scene—the young Girolamo Savonarola.

Under the rule of Azzo Novello the city revived. Peace was come at last. Every sign of Ghibelline sympathy was met with severe repression, and quiet reigned in the Piazza, over which the dead bodies of the vanquished factionaries dangled from pinnacle and battlement. The great strife raged ceaselessly without,



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and the city sent forth her young men to follow the banner of the Marquis, but all she knew of war herself was the tale they brought back from time to time, which, passing from mouth to mouth round the winter fireside, or in summer time by the fountains where the women drew their water, grew into the picturesque legends of the chroniclers. Thus the citizens shared the triumph of Azzo Novello on the great day in 1248 when, leading out the starving defenders of Parma, he and his allies overthrew Frederick's arrogantly-named city of Vittoria, and spoiled it of all its heaped-up treasure. Tradition relates that when the Marquis d'Este returned to Ferrara, two lions, the only trophies their hero had chosen for himself, were led behind him through the streets. The old bas-relief existing upon the 'Torre de' Leoni, and giving it its name, is said to have been sculptured to commemorate these lions. Not long after, in 1249, the Ferrarese helped the men of Bologna to rout the Imperial army at Fossalta, where a blow more bitter than defeat was inflicted on the great Emperor by the capture of his son, the young King Enzo, whose long golden hair and noble stature filled the multitudes with wonder as he was conducted to his life-long prison in Bologna. Frederick's fortunes were drooping; he died a year later, and the Ferrarese, with all good Guelfs, firmly believed the legend that he was murdered by his own son Manfred.

But the sword of the Ghibellines still continued to destroy in the hands of the terrible Ecelino da Romano, whose power had become almost independent of Imperial support and threatened to extinguish the liberties of all North Italy. Ferrara with the rest of the cities was called upon for troops and subsidies to oppose him, but the defence languished, baffled by his great resource and prestige. At last the general danger provoked



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a great effort. The Church took up with new energy the holy cause of the nation, and in 1255 Pope Alexander IV. proclaimed a crusade against Ecelino. Hope and ardour revived in the Guelf party as the Marquis Azzo Novello, appointed to lead the armies of the League, lifted up the standard of the Cross against the enemy of Italy. The cities united together and took the field in force. But for several years yet the extraordinary spirit of the great Ghibelline captain held them at bay, smiting and scattering their armies more than once, and it was not till 1259 that his end came at the bridge of Cassano, where he was entrapped at last, and tearing open the wounds which his captors had bound up, the wild "hill-cat" died with the same grim resolve with which he had lived and fought.

The triumph of the Guelfs shed glory on Ferrara, the city of the great Marquis. The shining valour and repute of Azzo Novello filled the people with pride. But they were beginning to feel the penalties of subjection, and to groan under the burden of supporting the increasing state of their prince. While Azzo lived, however, discontent was kept well in check. Proscription and banishment had rendered the Ghibellines harmless, and in 1260 one of those strange impulses of repentance which were for ever interrupting men's passions in Italy brought a remnant of the hostile party, led by their hereditary chief, Salinguerra II., to Azzo's feet. In a throng numbering two hundred, their naked shoulders bleeding from self-inflicted lashes, they entered the city and went and cast themselves down before the Marquis, who allowed them to return to their old homes.

In the quiet which Ferrara now enjoyed the peaceful arts began to flourish. Man of war as the Marquis was, passing from battlefield to battlefield all his life, and involved in complicated politics, he

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foreshadowed the love for the graces of life which distinguished his house later. His Court was one of the first in Italy to cultivate the chivalrous customs which had crossed the Alps with the northern invaders. Ferrara, but a short while before the scene of sordid anguish, squalor and cruelty, became now one of the fairest of cities, full of the splendour of tourneys and feasts of chivalry and courts of love. The noblest knights in Europe flocked thither and the streets heard new melody. For this was the hour when, amid the noise of war, the voice of the sweet singers of the "*lingua d'oc*" was heard all over Italy; when men, sheathing their bloody swords at even, gathered round the minstrel in hall or market place, and drew balm for their restless spirits from the enchantment of measured sounds, which told of love and honour. Nowhere was the bearer of the lyre more welcome than in the palace of the Marquis Azzo. Thither came the princes among the troubadours—*Rambuldo di Vaquiras*, the devout servant of a beautiful princess, *Beatrice of Montserrat*, and as proven in war as in love and song, whose cadenced utterances linger to this day; *Raimondo d'Arles*, *Aimeric Pequilhan* and a host of others, whose names and songs have long been forgotten. They knelt at the feet of the Marquis's wife and daughters, *Madonna Costanza* and *Madonna Beatrice*, and his niece, the unhappy Queen of Hungary, driven out from her kingdom by her wicked stepson, King *Bela*, charming these fair ladies with *canzoni* in praise of their courtesy, or holding their interest by the quick play of alternate wit in those arguments upon fantastic points of love and honour, which were called "*tenzoni*," and in which the combatants employed with subtle skill all the delicate forms of their art. When the Marquis held open court, jongleurs from all parts would come

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together and, after the jousts were over, would engage in these poetic contests. Ferrara produced a minstrel of her own, Maestro Ferrarino, who is said to have excelled all his rivals. His worth is registered in a very precious code of Provençal poetry, written in 1254, and preserved at Modena. Another poet of this time, Anselmo da Ferrara, who wrote in the vulgar tongue, is remembered by some rude verses of his still extant. The city owned a painter too, Gelasio di San Giorgio, who is said to have painted the Fall of Phaeton for the Marquis, and for the Bishop the oft-repeated story, “San Giorgio Kavalieri cum la puela ac il Dracon truce interfecto cum la lancea.” In general culture she surpassed her neighbours; she had flourishing public schools, frequented by students from other parts who had been driven out of their own sanctuaries of learning by war and general disorders. Many churches and convents arose in the city under the generous patronage of Azzo. His daughter Beatrice, whom death had robbed of her betrothed, adopted the religious life, and for her Azzo built and endowed the Convent of San Antonio. This lady was raised by the Pope after her death to the second order of Sainthood, like her aunt, another Beatrice, who had founded a convent in the Paduan hills. Each is known as the Beata Beatrice d’Este. These spiritual honours point not only to the shining charity of the two princesses, but also to the great consequence of the House in the eyes of the Church.

The whole reign of the Marquis Azzo Novello was indeed a time of real prosperity. Even his enemies acknowledged his virtues, and when he died in 1261, and was carried with solemn pomp to the church of San Francesco, the citizens of both parties joined in the lament over his bier, crying: “This man was not cruel, but was beneficent and pious.”

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Rinaldo d'Este, Azzo's son, who had been carried away to Sicily by Frederick II. as a hostage for the faith of his father, had died there, poisoned, it was said, by the Emperor. But he had left a son, Obizzo, borne to him by a beautiful Sicilian washerwoman. The great repute of his predecessor stood this seventeen-year-old boy in good stead when the old Minister, Aldighieri Fontana, led him forth to be elected by the people. Mingled with the vast throng of soldiers, citizens and "pilgrims" from the country all round, were many embittered with regret for slain and banished kinsfolk, and for the lost freedom of the Commune, but the partisans of Este, with hands upon their swords, girdled the Piazza, and none dared protest as full dominion of the city and territory of Ferrara was conferred upon the young Marquis, with power, as a chronicler present records, to do all things according to his will, both just and unjust; and thus was bestowed upon him, the writer drily adds, a power greater than God's, Who is unable to do anything unjust.

And, unless history lies, Obizzo made full use of the prerogative to do injustice. Only a few years after his accession, the faithful old Aldighieri Fontana fell into disgrace and died, poisoned, it was believed, by the Marquis. This event and the fierce revolt of the whole house of Fontana immediately after are probably connected with the "unseemly tale," which Dante touches on in the *Inferno*, in the confession of Venedico Caccianimico :

"I' fui colui, che la Ghisolabella  
Condussi a far la voglia del Marchese  
Come che suoni la sconcia novella."<sup>1</sup>

Canto XVIII. v. 55.

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<sup>1</sup> "It was I who led the fair Ghisola to do the Marquis's will, however the unseemly tale may sound."



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Ghisolabella was a Bolognese woman whom one of the Fontani had brought to Ferrara as his bride, and who had apparently attracted the love of Obizzo. It was probably the indignation of the old Minister at the affront to his family which brought upon him the revenge of the despotic prince. This is one of the many evil memories that cling about the name of Este, guessed at but never revealed to the open day. It brought its revenge; the Marquis was able to overcome the revolt, but the Fontani and their friends, banished from the city, sought out the Ghibelline exiles and threw in their lot with them, proving a sharp thorn in the side of Obizzo and all his house.

The Marquis's passions were tempered by a subtle understanding. He was a prudent and able ruler and strengthened the power of his House, ruling the city with a rigorous hand. As leader of the Guelf party in North Italy, he took an energetic part both with his sword and at the council table, but ever with an eye turned to the power that held the field at the moment. He professed the traditional fidelity of the Estensi to the Church, and Charles of Anjou had no more devoted adherent when he came, at Pope Clement IV.'s instigation, to overthrow the House of Suabia in the south. But when the Emperor Rodolph descended the Alps to receive the homage of Italy, the Marquis d'Este hastened to kiss his hand, and towards the end of his life he wisely endeavoured to reconcile the two great factions in the country by taking to wife the daughter of the great Ghibelline lord of Verona, Alberto della Scala.

Under him Ferrara was a flourishing oasis in the blood-stained desert which Italy then was. Trade and agriculture were carried on undisturbed; the splendour of the Court, the visits of great princes, the



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continual tournaments and ceremonies, filled the city with bright pageantry and jollity. No wonder men looked with envy from the neighbouring cities and sighed for a strong and politic hand to give them peace also. All desire for freedom was being slowly killed in the Communes by the long agony of party strife, and one by one, as the century grew old, they began to submit themselves, like Ferrara nigh a hundred years before, to the tyranny of the strongest within their gates. In 1288 Modena gave herself to Obizzo, and a year later Reggio followed her example, and the principality of the Estensi, which already included Rovigo, Adria, and many smaller cities and important fiefs, now became one of the most powerful in Italy. \*

But to gain his ends and crush his enemies the Marquis had soaked his scaffolds with blood, and sent many a one to taste how bitter a thing it is to tread another man's stair. And retribution waits on tyranny. Chroniclers relate that he died miserably, smothered in his bed by his own sons, Azzo and Aldobrandino. Nor did there lack a Florentine soul which, esteeming liberty above all earthly good, knew the destiny of such a one after death. Dante, passing with Virgil along the shore of the river of blood where "si piangono li spietati danni" saw Obizzo d'Este immersed therein, together with Ecelino, the old foe of his House, the hostile champions united at last in the common punishment of their common sins—

"E quella fronte c'ha il pel così nero  
è Azzolino; e quell'altro ch'è biondo  
è Obizzo da Esti, il qual per vero  
fu spento dal figliastro su nel mondo." <sup>1</sup>

Canto XII. v. 109.

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<sup>1</sup> "And that brow which has the hair so black is Azzolino; and that other, who is blonde, is Obizzo of Este, who in verity was quenched by his stepson up in the world."

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Azzo VIII  
x Tyranny, moreover, was be eding its own weakness. Discord was busy within the House itself. The guilty accord of Obizzo's sons now gave way to bitter dissensions. Azzo, the eldest, seized his father's state, denying all share to his brother Aldobrandino, who left the city in wrath and became thenceforth the bitterest enemy of Ferrara and the rallying point for all the foes of his family. The new Marquis was a brilliant and energetic prince, famous in war and in all mighty enterprise; "the most beautiful and redoubted tyrant in Lombardy," Villani calls him. But he was rash and violent, at once ambitious and unsteady in his policy, and his reign brewed woe for his state. Ferrara was carried into the vortex of party strife. Azzo headed the Guelf faction with such ardour that it was never called by any other name than "the Marquis's party." He embroiled Ferrara in exhausting quarrels, especially with Parma and Bologna. Azzo's life is a cloud of battle wherein we discern him ever in the thickest of the fray, carrying fire and sword through many a city and flourishing province. He won many victories, but got nothing by them, says Benvenuto da Imola, but fatigue and expense. A new Salinguerra arose, animated by the old hatred of his house towards the Estensi, and with the other Ghibelline families raised sedition again in Ferrara. The city seethed with plots, which the Marquis endeavoured with cruel severity to repress.

At the same time his Court was a continual spectacle of splendid pageants and the mirror of all chivalrous custom. But the fair promise in art and letters shown earlier in the city was lost now in a stagnation which lasted more than a hundred years. So unresponsive was Ferrara to the "*dolce stil novo*" that Dante in his Treatise on the Vulgar Speech could put on her the famous reproach of having produced no poets. This

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he attributes to her citizens having a spice of sharpness in their tongue, which has remained with them, he believes, as a relic of the admixture of the foreign Longobards with them: "For from being accustomed to their own sharpness they cannot adopt the Courtly Vulgar Tongue without a kind of roughness." The poet of the *Commedia* is a severe judge of the Marquis Azzo, one of the busiest actors in that history which Dante himself saw making, and which filled him with bitterness and grief. In the same treatise there is a scathing denunciation of this prince, together with Frederick King of Sicily, Charles King of Naples, and John Marquis of Montserrat:

"What is the sound now uttered by the trumpet of the latest Frederick? What is that now uttered by the trumpet of the latest Charles? What is that uttered by the horns of the powerful Marquises, John and Azzo? . . . What but 'Come, ye murderers; come, ye traitors; come, ye followers after avarice.'"

And a sentence further on:

"The praiseworthy discernment of the Marquis d'Este and his munificence prepared for all make him beloved"

is believed to refer, with sarcastic intent, to Azzo, whose whole career was a striking example of indiscretion. A worse charge against the Marquis is made in the *Purgatorio*, where Jacopo del Cassero relates how his death wounds were dealt him in the Paduan marshes, there where he thought himself most secure:

"Quel da Esti il fe'far, che m'avea in ira  
assai più là che dritto non volea."<sup>1</sup>

*Purg.*, Canto V. v. 77.

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<sup>1</sup> "He of Este had it done, who held me in wrath far beyond what justice would."

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Jacopo, a noble of the Romagna, had been Podestà of Bologna during the war between that city and Ferrara; he had heaped taunts and insults upon the Marquis, who had sworn to be revenged on this "ass-driver" of the Marches. Two other passages in the *Commedia* call to mind political acts of Azzo's, which were fraught with dire consequences for himself and his state. In 1300 he leagued Ferrara with Milan and gave his widowed sister Beatrice to Galeazzo Visconti, thus alienating all his old allies. Beatrice's first husband, Nino da Gallura, lamenting her inconstancy, foretells to Dante (*Purg.*, Canto VIII. v. 73) that she will long in misery for the "bende bianche" which she has renounced. Soon after the marriage, in fact, the Visconti were driven out of Milan by their enemies, and Galeazzo and his wife lived long in exile at Ferrara. The Marquis's own second marriage in 1305 to Beatrice of Naples was his crowning act of folly. Her father, King Charles, was accused of having made a sale and bargain of his youthful daughter to her elderly bridegroom "as corsairs do with other slaves," says Dante. Azzo had indeed to pay a heavy price for her. As the bride entered the city, Francesco d'Este, his youngest brother, quitted it, enraged at the possibility of a new heir to the throne which he had expected to inherit. He joined Aldobrandino, and the Ferrarese exiles rallied round the two princes with new ardour and hope. Parma, Bologna, Verona, with yet other cities, alarmed by Azzo's ambitious alliance with Naples, leagued against him. His dominions were invaded, his castles seized, his seat and life menaced by a hundred plots. Modena and Reggio revolted, and, after a long and terrible struggle with the Marquis and his partisans, shook off his yoke. Azzo saw his state falling to pieces. A Ghibelline army approached the very walls of Ferrara,



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and, though they failed to gain admittance through friends within as they had expected, they wasted and burnt the fair fields around. Meanwhile the Marquis was struggling against sedition in the city, where his hangman and torturers were hard at work, and where whole families were thrown together into his dungeons to perish. His last days were spent in continual battle, now in his enemies' territories, now in his own, where treachery lost him more strongholds than his unconquerable energy could redeem. Struck by mortal illness, he still insisted on leading his men to the attack of two castles held by his enemies, out of which he drove them in triumph and brought his troops back to Ferrara for the last time, loaded with spoil. Soon after he was carried to the old family home at Este to die, distracted in his last moments by the clamour of brothers and nephews for the blood-stained sceptre which was falling from his hand.

The House was now hopelessly divided against itself and civil war broke out. Fresco, a natural son of Azzo, had himself proclaimed Marquis and held Ferrara for some months, while Francesco d'Este, aided by the sons of Aldobrandino, possessed himself of a large part of the state. Neither could overcome the other, and the struggle went on, causing confusion and distress everywhere. This unhappy condition of things exposed Ferrara to the ambition of other powers, and both princes were weak enough to listen to offers of help from outside. Venice took up the cause of Fresco, the Pope befriended his rival. The ancient claims of the Church to supremacy over Ferrara had not been forgotten by Clement V., and in despatching his Legate, Arnaldo Pelagrua, to the aid of the Marquis Francesco, he secretly charged him to "recover" Ferrara for the Holy See. A large army under Pelagrua and Francesco d'Este ap-



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proached the city, and Fresco, despairing of help from the people whom he had alienated by his cruelty, abandoned the defence and fortified himself, with a few followers, in Castel Tedaldo, whence he despatched messengers to Venice for succour. The Republic sent a fleet and garrisoned the Castle and the suburb surrounding it, and, once in possession, they forced Fresco to yield up all his rights to the Republic and sent him into virtual captivity at Venice. Francesco likewise found himself put aside, for the Legate, as soon as he had entered the city, revealed his commission and assumed the government in the name of the Pope.

*March  
April* A fearful struggle now began between the two usurping parties for possession of the city. Daily battles took place in the streets, waged with a ferocity that spared no captives. The soldiers slaughtered and ravaged and committed horrible excesses upon the citizens; all order and security were speedily lost, trade was stopped, and the populace, maddened by want and wrongs, grew brutal likewise and massacred in their turn. The fields around were wasted, and the Venetians, cutting the river banks, let loose the waters and transformed the fertile land into a vast plague-breathing swamp.

This misery endured a whole year. But the Legate, supported by the Marquis Francesco and most of the citizens, gradually beat back his opponents. The Pope published a great crusade against Venice, and a number of cities responded by sending help to Pelagrua. The Venetians were driven to a last stand in Castel Tedaldo, where they defended themselves desperately. But the besiegers forced their way in finally and put nearly all to the sword, except a few whom they blinded and sent to Venice to tell the tale. They filled up a great breach made by the

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Venetians in the river bank with a vast mound of dead bodies, flinging on top one Ser Svagardo, a Ferrarese traitor, who had helped to cut it, whence the place was ever after called la Motta di Ser Svagardo.

But the city was no better off, for the Legate remained in possession. The Commune was compelled to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Pope and to renounce allegiance to the Estensi. A hateful and oppressive domination was now imposed upon the people. Their discontent was overawed by Gascon mercenaries. Nevertheless, revolts broke out, instigated by the old Ghibelline families; the palaces and houses of the Estensi and their friends were sacked and set in flames. In the retribution which followed one of the risings a number of the most honourable citizens were hanged on the Piazza, and the city was delivered up for three days to the licence of the Papal soldiers. On another occasion, a number of Ferrarese Ghibellines who had taken refuge at Feltre under the safe conduct of the Bishop of that city, were delivered up by him to Pino della Tosa, the Governor of Ferrara, who put every one of them to death. Dante reproves the dreadful bitterness of party feeling which could instigate such treachery as the Bishop's :

“Troppo sarebbe larga la bigoncia  
che ricevesse il sangue ferrarese  
e stanco chi il pesasse ad oncia ad oncia  
che donerà questo preti cortese  
per mostrarsi di parte.”<sup>1</sup>

*Par., Canto IX. v. 55-59.*

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<sup>1</sup> “Too ample were the charger which should receive  
Ferrara's blood, and weary who should weigh it ounce by  
ounce,  
Which this obliging priest shall give to prove himself a  
partisan.”

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Between the Legate and the dispossessed Estensi secret distrust and hostility reigned, and the suspicions of the Papal Governor were aggravated by the constancy and devotion of the Ferrarese to their hereditary princes. One day in 1312, as the Marquis Francesco was returning from hawking, with a single attendant, he was attacked outside the old Porta de' Leoni, close to where the Castle now stands, by a party of the Gascon garrison. Flinging his falcon from his wrist, he defended himself with desperate valour, laying many of his assailants low, but fell at last pierced with a hundred wounds. His dead body was stripped by the greedy mercenaries and left on the ground, not a single person in the city daring to approach, so great was the terror of the prevailing tyranny, till many hours later, when the Preaching Friars, having obtained leave, carried him away and buried him in their church of San Domenico.

Grief and indignation filled the citizens, but the Papal authorities openly approved the deed, declaring the Marquis d'Este to have been a secret rebel to the Church. The tyranny waxed now even more intolerable under a new Governor appointed by King Robert of Naples, to whom the Pope had handed over the city, alarmed at the temper of the people. They were growing savage; and the nephews of Francesco, Rinaldo and Obizzo d'Este, to whom the inheritance of their house was now fallen, were at work everywhere, exciting enthusiasm for their cause among the enemies of the Church. The slaying of a noble youth of the Bocchimpane family by the Governor, gave the final impulse to the long gathering rebellion, and one July day in 1317 the whole city suddenly rose. A vast throng of artisans and peasants, armed with their tools and led by the Bocchimpane and other partisans of the Estes, stormed through the

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streets. They were met by the Gascon garrison, who drove them back, killing some of their leaders. But



VIA DELLA VOTTE.

they barricaded themselves behind the benches of the Cobblers at the head of the Piazza, where they could not be dislodged ; new forces swarmed to join them,



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and the Gascons were surrounded by overwhelming numbers and were compelled to retire to Castel Tedaldo. The city fell into the hands of the rebels; the princes of Este came galloping in, and Rinaldo, putting himself at the head of the people, led them to the attack of the fortress. For several days the garrison held out, fighting with the valour of men who expect no mercy. But the help they expected from the Guelfs outside never came, and they surrendered, with the promise that their lives should be spared. Nevertheless, as they came forth, the people fell upon them and they were torn to pieces; the Castle was sacked from corner to corner, and every trace of the hated domination swept away with savage fury. On the 17th day of August, amid extraordinary jubilee, Rinaldo and Obizzo d'Este, with their younger brother Niccolo, and their cousins Azzo and Bertoldo, sons of the murdered Francesco, were proclaimed joint lords of Ferrara by the general voice of the people.

So la Casa d'Este returned to its own once more. But the State was sick, disordered and impoverished. Nor were the troubles over. John XXII., who had succeeded Pope Clement, smote the rebellious city with his ban. The silence of the air which no bells shook, the failure of the Sacraments, the estranged faces of the priests, were intolerable penalties to a city which had never before lacked spiritual consolations. They began to murmur, and the Estensi, mindful of late misfortunes, sought reconciliation with the Church. It was only obtained at heavy cost. They were forced to acknowledge the full supremacy of the Holy See and to accept investiture of their hereditary State from the Pope as his Vicars; with the obligation of paying a fixed annual tribute and seeking reinvestiture periodically.

Thus the old free domination of the Estensi was





CLOISTER OF SAN ROMANO



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now limited, and the Church had established a hold which was long afterwards to be the ruin of the city.

But war still continued. Ferrara had been forced into an unnatural alliance with the Ghibellines, on account of the quarrel with the Church, and in 1332 she joined in a great league against the Cardinal Legate, Beltrando del Poggetto, Governor of Bologna, who in alliance with the new Emperor, John of Bohemia, was seeking to conquer the free states of Italy. Misfortune befell the arms of the Marquis Rinaldo and his brothers, and the enemy entered the territory of Ferrara, and invested the city closely by land and by water. But succour arrived from Milan and Florence, and on an appointed day the Marquis Rinaldo made a grand sortie and fell on the Legate's camp. The enemy, bewildered by a great clamour of voices, bells and instruments of music, and suddenly assailed in the rear by the Florentines and Milanese, were thrown into confusion and defeated with great slaughter. Released from this peril, the Ferrarese under Rinaldo, one of the most valiant captains of his time, swept forward to further victories; the cities of the Romagna were recovered for their rightful lords, whom the Legate had deposed, Argenta was wrested from him, and in 1334 the Marquis carried succour to the revolted Bolognese and drove Beltrando out of his last stronghold. Modena, which Rinaldo was on the point of recovering when he died in 1336, surrendered shortly afterwards to the Marquis Obizzo, and the Estensi once more found themselves masters of the greater part of their old dominions.

The war with Beltrando had again estranged Ferrara and the Church. But the prudence of Obizzo and the humiliations which the Papal arms had suffered brought about a new peace in 1344. Clement VI. sent an ambassador, to whom were relinquished

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the keys of the city, which he kept under his pillow for fifteen nights, causing his squires to open and shut the gates with them as many times, in token of the sovereignty of the Pope, after which observance they were handed back to the Marquis and he was solemnly reinvested with the city and territory of Ferrara, as Vicar-General of the Holy See.

The suffering which had been so long the portion of Ferrara, robbing her of all share in the bright achievements in art and letters which glorified this century in Italy, was now somewhat mitigated. Under the settled rule of her restored sovereigns, the city had a chance of recovering from the pitiable condition to which she had been reduced. War still raged around her. Now that the Imperial power was overthrown in the Peninsula, the idea of conquest was taken up by the great Italian princes themselves, and the passionate party feeling which still possessed the country vented itself in the wars provoked by their ambitions. As a Guelf city Ferrara had to resist the encroachments first of the Scaligen of Verona, and later on in the century of the still more formidable Visconti of Milan, who proved themselves her bitter enemies. Her position exposed her peculiarly to attack both by land and water, and it was only by actively leaguings with the other Guelf cities, and by continually fortifying their states with strong castles and towers, that the Estensi could maintain their safety. The Marquis Obizzo, who, after the death of his brothers, possessed himself of the whole power, and the three sons who succeeded him in turn and ruled during the rest of this century—Aldobrandino, Niccolò II. and Alberto—were continually involved in warfare. Their Ghibelline enemies were reinforced by the open aid and secret conspiracies of the kinsmen thrust out from their share in the dominions of the house. Nevertheless, Obizzo, and



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his sons after him, succeeded in establishing the foundations of the peace and neutrality which became later on the distinguishing policy of the Estensi. And their capital at least was spared the presence of hostile armies in her streets.

But her progress was terribly checked by the awful tribulation which came upon her, as upon all Italy, in 1347 and 1348, and which makes a landmark in the history of the Middle Ages. Beneath the thunders of Heaven all lesser sounds now fell silent. Men left off disputing, as famine, earthquake and pestilence smote them in awful succession. The virile energy that had survived centuries of struggle died under this last and mightiest scourge, and the enfeebled humanity that emerged from the terrible purification turned all its desire to the joy of life. Discord was still the law of its being, but war became a sort of mockery, involving no principle of patriotism or faith. It was long before Ferrara could shake off the langour which followed the plague. Her weakened people could not keep up the defences against the river, which repeatedly broke through and desolated the fields, sweeping away harvests and cattle. But prosperity gradually returned, favoured by a steady government and by the submissiveness of the broken-spirited city, whose patient acceptance of their despotic rule spared her lords the use of those bloody measures by which most of the Italian tyrants were compelled to secure their thrones. As agriculture and industry revived, the heavy taxation could be increased without fear of resistance. The Court of Obizzo and his sons was one of the most magnificent of the time in Italy. It was continually visited by sovereigns and distinguished personages, who found the now peaceful city a convenient meeting-place for the arrangement of treaties. Giovanni Villani, the Florentine historian, who stayed there in 1341, has



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left testimony to the liberality of the Estensi. Obizzo's palace was adorned by the presence of "la bella Lippa di Bologna," who is said to have surpassed all other women of her time in beauty. The Marquis had brought her to Ferrara, where she became the mother of his many sons, and her family, the Ariosti, followed her from Bologna, and obtained high favour at the Court. From them sprang in later days the honour of Ferrara, Messer Lodovico Ariosto. The poet celebrates the founder of the fortunes of his house, among the famous women of la Casa d'Este. These princes were generous protectors of the literature of the day. The minstrels and romancers, whose long tales of love and chivalry in the Franco-Venetian dialect had succeeded the songs of the old Provençal troubadours, found warm welcome at Ferrara. The palace swarmed with "uomini di corte," a sort of gentry who made a profession of wit. The presence of the famous Gonnella, around whose name a whole folklore of half fabulous buffoonery has gathered, played about the palace of Obizzo. Then there was Basso della Penna, a little innkeeper whom Franco Sacchetti has immortalised in some of those tales which bring before us the life of the fourteenth century as no history can do. "He who would pay attention to the humours of princes," says Sacchetti, "so as to keep them in good temper, must every hour think of new things." The ready and resourceful Basso could do this well, and was the delight of the Marquis Aldobrandino.

Besides these frivolous spirits, there was a poet of some renown in the city, Maestro Antonio da Ferrara, a somewhat whimsical genius, an intimate of Petrarch's. On a false report arriving one day of the great poet's death at Naples, Maestro Antonio published a *bizarre* allegorical poem called the "Funeral Pomp of Petrarch,"

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which was widely read, and caused all Petrarch's friends to take him for a spectre when he appeared among them again alive and well. The famous poet himself visited Ferrara in 1368, towards the end of his life, and being struck by sudden illness, was visited and comforted daily by Ugo d'Este, one of the sons of Obizzo. A touching affection sprang up between the old man and the youth whom Petrarch in a letter written later anxiously exhorts to forego the chivalrous sports he was so fond of, and not risk his life in childish adventure, which he should leave to those whose life or death was of no account. Shortly after Ugo died, and Petrarch, in a letter of consolation to the reigning Marquis Niccolò, recalls the kindness and compassion of the blooming youth beside the sick-bed of an old man. The gentleness and engaging personality of this prince, his love of letters and early death, make him in some sort a forerunner of the later and more famous Leonello.

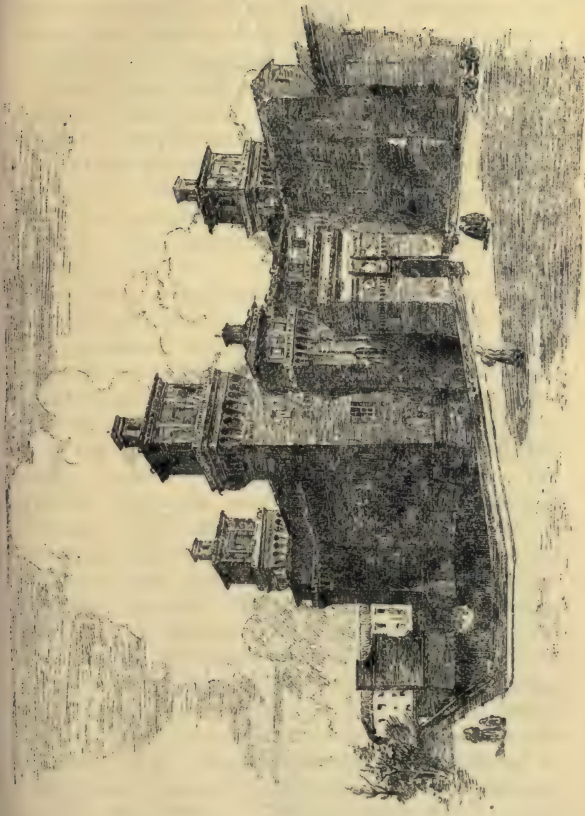
Towards the end of the century Ferrara was in a flourishing condition again. But discontent began to stir anew in the people. The pomp and splendour of the Court was a heavy burden on them, and their princes, engaged in warfare and pleasure, gave little heed to their complaints. Niccolò II., *il Zoppo*, or the Lamè, who succeeded his brother Aldobrandino in 1361, had a Minister, Tommaso da Tortona, to whom he gave almost absolute authority, advancing him to the highest office in the State. Tommaso's only principle was to serve his master and himself by extortions from the citizens, who vented all their rage and hate upon him. Niccolò took no heed of the popular feeling, and the trouble grew and grew. Old voices were heard about the city whispering the forgotten name of liberty, and beneath the tumult of simple rage and hunger a ghostly party formed itself

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out of faction hatreds buried long before. A day came when with one accord the people ran mad. A great multitude gathered together, surged into the Piazza, and surrounded the Palace, crying: "Death to the traitor Tommaso." They broke into the Minister's office, dragged out the registers of the taxes and heaped them in a huge funeral pile at the corner of Via S. Romano, still clamouring without cease for their victim. The wretched man, hidden in the Palace, was trusting to the protection of the prince whom he had served with his crimes. History tells many tales of the futility of such trust. The hours passed, the cry rose steadily like the sound of a deluge which must overwhelm all. Some say the rebels had captured a young son of the Marquis, and held the boy's life before his father as the price of submission. At last the will of the despot gave way. Tommaso made his peace with God and was cast out to die.

The anger of the people was appeased with the sacrifice and the revolt subsided, and when the Marquis and his brother Alberto rode out the next day the citizens gathered round them with looks of shame and implored pardon, protesting inviolable faith and love towards the House of Este. Niccolo granted them grace and promised to relieve them of some of the offensive taxes. But it was only to gain time, and as soon as the reinforcements he had sent for had arrived, he ordered the gates to be shut and proceeded to seize the chief culprits, whose names were revealed to him by a traitor. The people's one victim was avenged in the blood of scores of poor wretches, mostly plebeians and artisans, who were tied to the tails of asses and dragged through the streets to their execution on the gallows place beside the Po.

X This was the last revolt of Ferrara. The great



THE CASTLE.





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Castle, which lifts its grim towers above the city, is an enduring memorial of the event. No sooner was the danger past than the Marquis hastened to call a famous architect of the time, Bartolino da Novara, and bade him build a new and mighty stronghold for the future defence of her tyrants. Very soon the masons were raising the heavy foundations upon which the great pile is based and piercing them with a hundred dungeons, while still the bones of the rebels hung on the gallows, rattling the epitaph of the people's liberties. The rise of the Castle marks the complete subjugation of Ferrara.

But with its final triumph a sinister shadow seems to creep over la Casa d'Este. The quarrels, crimes and passions of its own children were to shadow its bright fortunes, and the dungeons of the new Castle would often house another sort of guest than contumacious citizens. The Castle was yet far from finished when one of the dark family tragedies happened with which it was to be too often connected. In 1387 Niccolò died and was succeeded by his brother Alberto. A gloom and presage of evil hung over the beginning of this prince's reign. The people, still mindful of the severities of Niccolò, regarded him with bitter hatred. Danger threatened from abroad. The Lord of Milan, Gian Galeazzo Visconti, was advancing in his career of conquest over all North Italy. Verona was crushed, Mantua was his obedient ally, Padua he held in the hollow of his hand, Venice he had stupefied as a snake ensnares a rabbit. Ferrara remained to be won, and Alberto was persuaded to abandon the constant policy of his house and ally himself with Milan. This displeased the Ferrarese and estranged his old allies. The Marquis Aldobrandino had left a son, Obizzo, who was much beloved by the people. Alberto, believing that this

nephew was plotting with his foes against his life and State, seized and beheaded him in prison in the dead of night, together with his mother. The cruel deed roused general indignation, and when the Marquis's rage was spent, he found himself without a single

friend except the subtle Gian Galeazzo, who would no doubt have got Alberto completely into his power had he not then been occupied in combating the opposition which was now raised against him by Florence.

Alberto soon abandoned Milan, however, and made peace with Florence and his old friends. He wiped out the memory of Obizzo in a fifteen days' feast which he ordained for the people on his marriage a little later, and then set himself to benefit his state. In 1391 he made a pilgrimage to Rome and obtained from the Pope a Bull very beneficial to Ferrara. It had been a common practice of landowners in the



STATUE OF MARQUIS ALBERTO  
ON FAÇADE OF CATHEDRAL.

Middle Ages to make a nominal gift of their lands to some neighbouring ecclesiastical body, receiving them back as fiefs, so as to share the immunity from attack enjoyed by Church property. As the country became settled, these feudal bonds, which involved the reversion of the lands on certain contingencies to the overlord, became very inconvenient. They were now

abolished by the papal decree. The content of the people showed itself in the statue of the Marquis Alberto which they set up on the façade of the Duomo, where we see it still, a quaint figure in pilgrim's garb, with a great slab beside it on which is set forth the papal Bull at length.

The Marquis also obtained from the Pope the rights and privileges for a University, which he instituted, summoning professors of note to its Chairs. He improved the outward aspect of the city, building some beautiful palaces, and the quaint medieval character of the place, with its narrow, overhung streets and gloomy towers, began to soften, and the stains of old bloodshed to fade out. The peaceful end of Alberto's reign is like the calm close of a day of storms, which gives promise of a happier morrow. With the Trecento an age of sorrow was passing away for Ferrara, and the eve of the new century bore for her a new hope, in due time to be accomplished.



## CHAPTER III

### *From War to Peace*

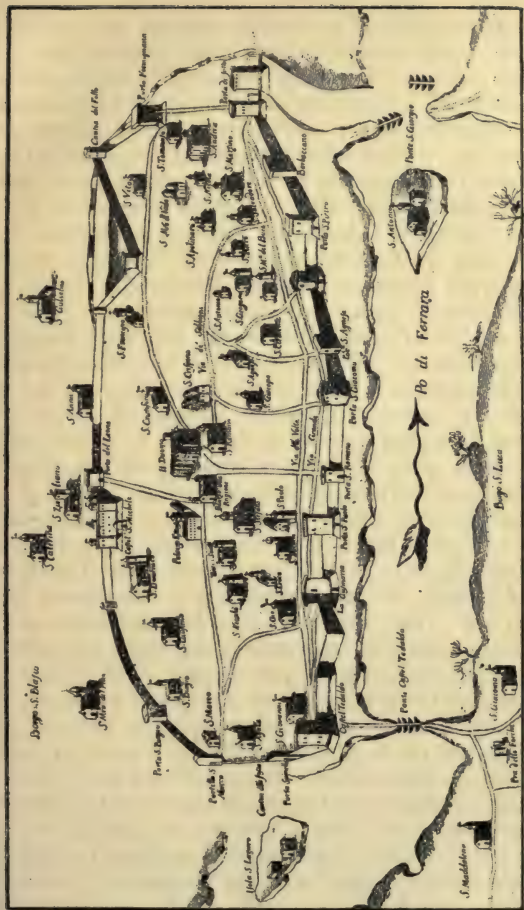
“O città bene avventurosa . . .

. . . la gloria tua salirà tanto  
ch'avrai di tutta Italia il pregio e'l vanto.”

*Orl. Fur.*, Canto XLIII.

FOR a while yet, however, the good time delayed its coming and hope was obscured by fresh trouble. The new Lord of Ferrara, Niccolò III., son of Alberto and a beautiful and learned Ferrarese lady, Madonna Isotta Albaresani, was but ten years old. There seemed little probability that a helpless child would be able to keep the sovereignty at a time when might was virtually the only right. But in Ferrara, more than elsewhere, was developed a sense of hereditary loyalty, and thanks to the people's habit of obedience and to the support of the Guelf allies of his house, Niccolò was destined to survive the thousand perils and adversities which beset his youth and become the chief maker of Ferrara's fortunes.

No sooner was the boy proclaimed Marquis than he was threatened by powerful enemies. The descendants of Francesco d'Este, who was murdered in 1312, had given much trouble to Niccolò's three predecessors, disputing the right of the sons of “la bella Lippa” to succeed to the dominions of the house. Azzo d'Este, the representative of this line, now seized the opportunity afforded by the new Marquis's tender years to make a determined attack upon him. The Duke of Milan



PLAN OF FERRARA, DRAWN BY BARTOLINO DA NOVARA IN 1395.

To face p. 64.



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and the other enemies of Ferrara, including many of the neighbouring barons, were ready to league with Azzo, while his partisans within the city did their utmost to excite rebellion in his favour. Meanwhile the people groaned under the cruel taxation necessitated by the defences and preparations for the war, and were made sullen by the spectacle of the torture and bloodshed by means of which Niccolò's Ministers struggled to suppress revolt and discontent. Disorder and misery prevailed, the city was disturbed by continual plots, while Azzo and his allies overran the Ferrarese territories, capturing castles and strong places. But succours from the Guelf cities came to the young Marquis, and with the aid of these the Ferrarese army at last defeated and captured Azzo at Portomaggiore in 1396. In spite of this relief, however, the city continued to be disturbed by a strong party of Azzo's friends, and the disorders continued for many years.

In the midst of these difficulties, his life continually endangered by plots, the young prince grew up, early familiar with treachery and cruelty, and indulged and flattered in every way by the servility of his guardians and attendants. Is it a wonder that his memory has come down darkened by passion and vice? But the nobler side of life was presented to him in the teaching of his old tutor, Donato da Casentino, the friend of Petrarch and Boccaccio, who developed in him a love for the fine arts, which he cultivated afterwards as much as the multifarious occupations of his life would allow. And in all the exercises and outward courtesies of chivalry he became a gallant and accomplished prince. When he was but fourteen a bride was given him, Gigliola, a daughter of Francesco de' Carrari, Lord of Padua. The nuptials were celebrated in Ferrara with magnificent festivities. Her father endeavoured to govern for his son-in-law and to restore order into the



still unquiet city. But the people were uneasy under any rule but that of the Estensi, and it was not long before the young Marquis cast off his father-in-law's tutelage and gathered the reins of government into his own hands. Under his vigorous rule peace and quiet were once more established in Ferrara. Niccolò's chief counsellor was a noble youth scarce older than himself, Uguccone Contrari, who remained his lifelong friend and most faithful servant. The two young knights plunged together into all valiant and chivalrous enterprises, now leading armies to the assault of cities and castles and vying as to who should be the first to scale the walls, now bearing off the palm in joust and tourney and winning the hearts of fair ladies, to whom Niccolò, according to the chroniclers, was irresistible. He early gained a too great fame for amorous exploits. The death of the Duke of Milan in 1402 relieved Ferrara of her most powerful enemy. The collapse of the overgrown state of Milan awoke a general struggle in North Italy over its remains, in which the Marquis Niccolò, appointed by Pope Boniface IX. Captain-General of the army of the Church, took an energetic part. In 1404 he supported his father-in-law against Venice, and brought upon himself the hostility of the great Republic. Beset by the Venetian forces on land and water, his capital threatened by starvation, his subject cities in flames, he was compelled to purchase peace by the surrender of the city and territory of Rovigo to Venice and the abandonment of the Carrari.

Schooled by this adversity, Niccolò befriended the weaker cause no more. He set himself to overcome rebellious barons in his own dominions, and to compel those that held independent sway in his vicinity to accept investiture of their states from him. By his vigorous and successful arms and the aid of able captains,

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such as Nanni Strozzi, the Florentine exile, and Sforza da Cotignuola, father of the great Condottiere who seated himself later on the throne of Milan, he thus extended and consolidated his power, and created around him a number of powerful feudatories who formed the nucleus of the illustrious Ferrarese aristocracy of later times. He was soon engaged in a desperate struggle with Ottobuono Terzo, lord of Parma and Reggio, the most infamous and barbarous tyrant of his day, who was finally overthrown by an act of treachery on the Marquis's part. Niccolò invited his enemy to a peaceful conference under the walls of Rubiera. The two parties were scarcely met when the Marquis's lieutenant, Sforza da Cotignuola, plunged his sword into Ottobuono's body, and the Ferrarese fell upon his followers and cut them to pieces. So bitter was party feeling in the country that this cruel act was lauded by all the Guelfs, and the Pope's secretary, Lusco, declared that in delivering the world of such an infamous monster the Marquis could have done nothing more agreeable to God and man. Parma and Reggio fell into Niccolò's hands, who soon relinquished the first to Milan, keeping Reggio, which became thenceforth an integral part of the principality of his House.

His ambition satisfied, and his enemies subdued, the Lord of Ferrara was now able to lay his sword aside and turn his thoughts to the manifold interests of peace. We see him in pilgrim's garb, with a band of noble followers, journeying to the holy shrines of Christendom, a true child of his age, urged partly by medieval devotion, partly by the new spirit of curiosity awakening everywhere in Italy, which inspired him with the same love of "vagabondage" charged to his House a century later by Castiglione in a letter to that most errant of princesses, Isabella d'Este. On his way to the Holy Land, he stopped wherever there was

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a sight to be seen. Castles inhabited by enchanted serpents, miracle-working bones of saints in ancient churches, ruins of antiquity, everything equally engaged his wonder and faith. To behold Cerigo, the island whence Paris was said to have rapt Helen, filled him with delight. The Venetian governors on the mainland and islands of the Greek seas entertained him with a thousand delights. At Corfu the banquet was laid in an exquisite garden beneath a roof of close pleached orange trees, from which the heavy-scented petals fell thickly upon the viands and into the goblets of Greek wine, and a blind poet enchanted the guests with songs of love to the accompaniment of the plaintive viola. But when the shores of Palestine were reached, song was banished, gay robes laid aside, and in the guise of poor, nameless palmers, mounted upon asses, each man with his pack upon his shoulders, the Marquis and his nobles made their way to Jerusalem. There they passed with deep devotion from one to another of the sacred scenes of Christian story and legend, and last of all they were allowed to behold the Sepulchre of Christ. A night was spent in prayer within the church which shelters that holiest of shrines, and after they had had a short sleep, the monks awoke them, midnight being past, and led them to the Tomb, where they partook of the Body of their Lord. Then the Marquis, rising, bade the five most worthy of his nobles kneel and receive the high and mystic consecration of knighthood, and himself knelt to receive it anew in that solemn moment from Alberto del Sale. Afterwards they ascended the Mount of Calvary, and there the Marquis fastened the spurs on his companions' heels. So in the place where Christ's Cross had been planted the proud of the earth once more acknowledged the gospel of humility.

Niccolò returned in safety from this adventurous

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journey, but another time, when he was coming back from the shrine of St. James of Galicia, he was treacherously seized by the lord of a castle in Piedmont whose hospitality he had sought, and let down by a rope into a deep tower, and there kept till he had promised to pay a heavy ransom. The timely arrival of the Count of Savoy to his rescue deprived the wicked castellan not only of the ransom but of his own head, and the robber fastness was razed to the ground.

The generous spirit of Niccolò's youth was early worn out in his busy life of war and politics. As he grew older his always violent passions, encouraged by the long habit of despotic power, grew brutal and uncontrollable, and he became the coarse and repulsive tyrant whose heavy face, seamed with a thousand lines of dissipation, has come down to us in the portrait medal of Pisanello. One looks in vain in it for any trace of the young knight worshipping on Mount Calvary, or bending his ear to the blind singer of Corfu. His dissolute life and countless amours made him notorious even in that loose age. The most careful historians have found it impossible to number his children. "Di qua e di là del Po, tutti figli di Niccolò," sang the Ferrarese, with double intent. The Marchesana Gigliola had died in 1416, leaving no children. But Niccolò's mistress, the beautiful Stella dall' Assassino, a lady of a noble Ferrarese family, connected with the Tolomei of Siena, had borne him many sons, who were brought up in his palace like princes. In 1419 the Marquis took a new bride, Parisina, daughter of Andrea Malatesta, Lord of Cesena. This lady was but fifteen, and was very beautiful, as we can easily believe of one of her house, though no portraits of her remain, like the Pisanello medals which show us the rare profiles of her cousins of Rimini, Sigismondo Pandolfo and Malatesta



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Novello. Madonna Parisina entered her new home in an ill-omened hour, received almost in silence by a people mourning the ravages of two dreadful years of pestilence. She seems to have been a joyous and gentle creature, full of interest in life. With the tolerance of the age she accepted the care of the Marquis's large family, and governed his household with most exemplary discretion, passing her life in domestic duties, surrounded by her twelve women, whom she ruled virtuously and trained in all housewifely knowledge and skill, at the fitting time finding a husband for each maiden and dowering her with fifty ducats and a well-filled marriage chest. The clothing of all the inhabitants of the palace, from prince to scullion, was the special occupation of this great lady of the fifteenth century and was no light task. A strange penury and lack of comfort, and even of mere decency, underlay the apparent splendour of the Court of Ferrara at this time. Throughout his reign Niccolò was straitened for money, his father's extravagance and the wars of his youth having left the treasury empty; and even later on the famous magnificence of the Estensi did not go much deeper than outward show. Parisina's closets were crowded with gorgeous garments, stiff with gold and lined with costly furs; rich tapestries, carpets, precious silver vessels worked by the most excellent craftsmen lay piled upon the shelves, only to be brought forth for some special festivity, when the chambers would be hastily apparelled in great magnificence, and the Marchesana herself would lay aside her ordinary gown of homespun such as her women wore and appear in cloth of gold. Niccolò himself was never seen except in splendid array, but the young princes and princesses went sadly short of garments. Borso's governors had to plead for a new tunic for him, since he had but his



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green one which he wore every day, and Meliaduse, sent by his father to Padua on some occasion, wrote to ask for four yards of cloth, that he might not lack hose altogether. Their beds were covered with rich stuffs, but the mattresses were of straw, the coverlets in rags, the pillows gnawed by rats. Their numerous attendants were still worse off. Parisina had to order cloth to be given to Meliaduse's tutor, that he might make himself a vesture, a pair of hose, and a hood, since he was so to speak naked, and it was not for the honour of the Marquis that his son's companion should go about in such a plight. The pages, children of noble birth, sent to be trained in courtly exercises in this famous home of chivalry, all slept huddled together on a little straw, and their long red hose and doublets embroidered with the white eagle of Este were often ragged.

Parisina herself did not lack the luxuries of the age. She would send to Venice, the emporium of all the precious merchandise of the East, for delicate perfumes, ivory and tortoiseshell combs. She loved and encouraged all the arts, and the first dawn of the Renaissance in Ferrara casts its faint light around the figure of this princess. Many excellent painters worked for her. They decorated coffers, caskets, household furniture, painted playing cards for her children, triptychs for her oratory. Her favourite books were the "*istorie francesi*" with which the palace was well furnished. For the French romance literature continued to hold sway in this Court, steeped in the chivalrous ideas which had come to it from the north with the troubadour and minstrel of earlier days. As she sat embroidering with her maidens, the Marchesana would bid one of them recite some long familiar tale of King Arthur, of Lancelot, or of Charlemagne and his Paladins, or the mythical heroes of Este,

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Foresto, Accarino, Rinaldo, or perhaps she would open some richly miniaturesd volume, and with Ugo d'Este, a youth of her own age, who often joined her in her bower, she would read the sad story of the loves of Tristan and Isolde. Parisina was always kind to her husband's children, but Ugo, the firstborn of the Marquis and Madonna Stella, she specially favoured. The young prince was beautiful and winning, and had been carefully trained in knightly exercises and courtesy. He was beloved by the people, and was destined by his father, who adored him, for his successor. Ugo, unlike his brothers and sisters, lacked for nothing. He went always splendidly arrayed; the Marchesana would command fine garments for him, of her own favourite colour, green.

Music and song were one of the chief delights of Ferrara. On festive days the streets were loud with the merry noise of pipes and tabors, cymbals and tambourines, and in the prince's palace the lute, the rebeck and psaltery were heard. Parisina was skilled with the harp, and would accompany herself as she sang to her little twin daughters, Ginevra and Lucia. Ugo, too, loved music and was a master of the instrument. Many details of this princess's simple and joyous existence have been gathered from the still existing archives of the House of Este; her love for her hounds and falcons; her race-horses, which she used to run in the races in the Via Grande on St. George's Day, and send to contend for the "palü" in other cities; how she shared with her stud groom and jockeys ("paggi a correre") the prizes which she often won; her journeys from one to another of the Marquis's summer palaces, scattered about his dominions. For the Renaissance spirit stirred in her too, and she was something of an errant princess. But after the May of 1424 her name appears no more in

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the family records. The bright young life seems to have been suddenly swallowed up in a cloud. Only the *Diario Ferrarese*, a chronicle of the time, and an old calendar of the Franciscan friars, make further mention of her. They note under the date of May 25th, 1425, that Madonna Parisina was beheaded, together with Ugo d'Este, in Castello Vecchio, in the depths of the tower which is called the Marchesana; and that with them suffered one Aldobrandino Rangoni. The calendar adds that on the same night they were carried to the cemetery of St. Francesco and there buried beside the Campanile. That is all.

The tragedy so briefly indicated must have startled all Italy. But all contemporary documents relating to it seem to have been destroyed, probably for the honour of the great House of Este. A century later, when the shame had been outlived, chroniclers and novelists poured out a hundred versions of the story, as it had come down by gossip. It seems that in the spring of 1424 the Marchesana went on a journey into the Romagna and visited her kinsfolk at Rimini. She was accompanied by Ugo d'Este. The two rode together in the heavy-scented air of May across the melancholy plain towards "*la marina, dove il Po discende,*" where the very name of Malatesta seems to spell misfortune for lovers. Like that other pair of Parisina's house, long before, love was conducting them also "*ad una morte.*" Not till a year later, however, did the catastrophe befall. Meanwhile some of Parisina's women were perforce in her confidence, and Ugo told all his grief to a favourite follower, Aldobrandino Rangoni. May had returned, "*the month that is the most delectable of all.*" One day, we are told, a servant called Zoese, who was highly favoured both by Niccolò and the Marchesana, was passing by the princess's apartment, and heard a

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damsel weeping outside. She had been beaten for some fault, and now in her rage and passion she revenged herself by betraying her mistress's secret. The man went off and told the Marquis all. Niccolò's wrath was terrible. It was not tempered by the



DUNGEONS OF THE CASTLE.

“manifest experience” which teaches us, as a chronicler remarks, “that man must be measured by the same measure with which he measures others.” Having assured himself that the report did not lie, he had the lovers seized and carried down into the dreadful dungeons of Castel Vecchio. The next day, denying them a trial or any possibility of uttering a plea, he condemned them to

death. No prayers or tears of the horrified household could move him. Uguccione da Contrari, his friend and favourite counsellor, the white-haired Minister, Alberto del Sale, fell on their knees and besought him to have mercy. In vain. That night, in “fundo turris,” beneath the level of the



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dark water in which the Castle is set, the sentence was fulfilled.

The chroniclers have set down many details of the lovers' last moments. But the true tale of their passion, despair and final agony is written in the grim and unresponsive walls of the dungeon only. Aldobrandino Rangoni suffered at the same time for his fidelity to the unfortunate prince. The same night, a procession of Franciscan friars silently left the Castello, carrying a bier whereon lay the three bodies wrapped in the same pall. Moving like shadows through the streets they came to the little cemetery adjoining the Church of S. Francesco, and there they buried them beside the Campanile. Campanile, cemetery and the church of that time are now gone, and all trace is long lost of the place where the bones of the lovers lie.

But revenge brought no peace to the Marquis. All that night he paced up and down his chamber. After he had learnt from the captain of the palace that his son was dead, he had broken into bitter lamentations, and for hours he remained tearing his hair and beating himself against the walls, crying out for Ugo, his first-born. For days he mourned and refused to be comforted, stricken by remorse for his severity to his son. But no pity for Parisina touched his heart, and he issued a decree commanding that all women in the city guilty of her fault should share her fate. The edict was actually carried out upon Madonna Laodamia Romei, wife of one of the chief magistrates.

The unhappy end of the lovers awoke loud compassion everywhere. Niccolò's conduct was condemned by all, and we are told that "it was said throughout the country of Italy that fortune had done this thing to him as a lawful vendetta, and for him no compassion was had."

Fortune has carried on the vendetta upon the

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memory of the Marquis. The piteous tale of the lovers will probably outlive all other remembrance of this time in Ferrara and poetical justice brand Niccolò for ever as a brutal tyrant. His benefits to his people have little availed his reputation. He lived many years after the tragedy, which was but a passing episode in his outward career. Other sons took Ugo's place in his favour, and in 1429 Parisina was succeeded by a new Marchesana, Ricciarda di Sallusto, by whom the Marquis had his only legitimate sons, Ercole and Sigismondo. It was now that under his steady and enlightened rule Ferrara entered upon the long era of peace and prosperity which culminated later in her "Age of Gold." By his wisdom and discretion he kept his state safely balanced between the different parties in the country; while remaining a faithful vassal of the Church, and on good terms with his powerful neighbour, Venice, he managed to ingratiate himself with Milan also, the hereditary foe of Ferrara. As the enemy of none, he became the adviser of all, the arbitrator in the general quarrels. But the chief honour of this prince is his solicitude for the good of his people. No prince's subjects, he vowed, should be richer than his. He relieved them of the most oppressive of the taxes, encouraged industry and commerce by all means in his power, removing vexatious restrictions upon the free barter of commodities, and redeemed the morasses in his dominions to the use of agriculture. As much as the leanness of his treasury, which he refrained from filling by over-burdening his subjects, would allow, he fostered art and letters. He summoned famous scholars to his Court, and to him Ferrara owes her first impulse towards intellectual attainments. But with the dawn of better days a fairer character appears on the scene and all the glory of the new time passes on from Niccolò to the stainless

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memory of his son Leonello. Already the graceful presence of this young prince, now heir to his father's dominions, is conspicuous in all the ceremonies and important events of the city, and the seared face of the old Marquis withdraws itself into the background.

In 1438 Ferrara, the most peaceful and orderly of Italian capitals, was chosen as the scene of the Great Council which was to settle the differences of the Western and Eastern Churches. Ferrara was accustomed to the stately spectacle of Pope and sovereign passing through the streets on visits to the prince, but never had she witnessed such magnificent pageants as these, or such an assembly of great personages, such a medley of strange costumes and complexions. The entry of Pope Eugenius, whom Leonello met on his arrival and saluted with a Latin speech, was conducted with great magnificence, the Marquis himself walking beside the Pontiff's mule and holding the bridle. A little later came the Emperor of Constantinople, that John Paleologus whose long face with its pointed beard, as we see it in Benozzo Gozzoli's frescoes in the Riccardi palace in Florence, wears the melancholy distinction of a worn-out royal race. The people gazed with wonder upon this monarch, who was come to see "whether his faith was better than ours"; on his gorgeous and bizarre apparel, the sky-blue umbrella held over his head, the purple and gold trappings of his charger, which was led by a chosen company of Niccolò's nobles on foot, while the Marquis and his two eldest sons, Leonello and Borso, rode beside him, and the streets rang with the clamour of music and the shouts of the spectators. He was conducted to the palace and up the great staircase, still on horseback, to the apartment where the Pope was lodged, and here the salutations of the two great dignitaries took place. The Patriarch of



Constantinople arrived next ; he was old and crabbed with the gout, and kept the proceedings at a standstill for a whole day by obstinately refusing to acknowledge the spiritual supremacy of the Pope and kiss the pontifical toe. The difficulty was solved by Eugenius at last consenting to waive the ceremony. With the arrival of the Despot of Morea, the Synod was now complete.

The sessions were held within the Duomo. Much time and discussion was spent on the arrangement of the seats in accordance with the pretensions of the various dignitaries. But when at last ready, the scene presented "a wonderful and awful sight, so that the church looked like heaven," says a spectator. The noble old Romanesque interior, with its rich marbles and warm-coloured brick, its gleaming mosaics and the shadow of its stately arcades, must have made a fit background for the grave figures in their stiff trappings of gold and purple and gems, as they sat ranged on thrones in the choir, Pope and Emperor, elevated above the rest, on either side of the High Altar. The Marquis is said to have caused the scene to be painted in the Palazzo del Paradiso by Antonio Alberti, but if so, the precious record of all these famous personages has utterly perished.

The solemn discussions as to whose faith was the best progressed very slowly and was interrupted before long. War had broken out between Milan and Venice again, involving the Pope, who was scared by the near presence of his enemies the Milanese in the Bolognese territory. Messengers arrived from Florence to offer the hospitality of that city to the Council, and finally the plague broke out in Ferrara, to the alarm of the visitors. So early in the following year, Pope Eugenius was shuffled out of the city at dead of night, to escape the vigilance of his enemies



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outside, and the rest of the guests departed shortly afterwards for the city of the Arno. There the meetings were continued, but as they could come to no conclusion, prince and patriarch finally separated and returned to their own homes.

The war of 1438 between Milan and Venice, which had disturbed the Council of the Churches, brought advantage to the Marquis d'Este. Venice, eager for his alliance, restored to him the territory of Rovigo, of which she had deprived him in 1405. Niccolò took little part in the actual warfare, though he sent his son Borso to take service with the Venetians. He did his utmost to promote peace, and helped to persuade the Duke of Milan to give his only daughter Bianca Visconte to Francesco Sforza, a marriage which, by bringing the great Condottiere in whose hands lay the fate of the war to the side of Milan, put an end to the conflict. Duke Filippo Maria, an old and weary man, leaned much upon the Marquis Niccolò, and in 1441 confided the government of Milan to him, while he himself retired for a while from the cares of State. The Marquis had not long taken up the charge, when he was struck by mortal illness and died in the arms of Uguccone Contrari. The unbroken affection between the prince and this noble follower gives a touch of tenderness to Niccolò III.'s sin-stained career. He was buried in his own city without pomp or parade, according to his own desire. So let his memory rest, without panegyric or malediction, while over it brightens the golden age which he had prepared for his children and his State.

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Age of Gold*

"Great and splendid is Florence, yet the worth of all her heaped-up treasures does not equal Ferrara's jewels. Her people have made her a city : Ferrara, through her princes, has grown great."

"Noble souls attract noble souls and know how to hold them fast."

GOETHE.—*Tasso*, Act I. Sc. i.

NICCOLÒ III. is the last truly medieval figure in Ferrara. The rude era of war was now completely over and the city was well embarked on a course of good fortune that was to last for half a century and bring her to great importance and renown among the states of Italy. Niccolò's prudence had secured for her a position of safe neutrality abroad, and his long and dominant rule had sealed the union between prince and people by disposing of ancient party opposition and the pretensions of other branches of the House. A sentiment of loyalty and affection, bred out of long habit, and rare indeed in Italy, animated the people towards their rulers. All was ripe in the now peaceful and prosperous city for the great burst of enthusiasm for letters and the fine arts to which this city owes her distinction in Italian history. Ferrara, subject as she was, body and soul, to her lords, was to represent perhaps more completely than any other city the peculiar culture of the Italian Re-





*To face p. 81.*



MEDALLION OF LEONELLO D'ESTE WITH REVERSE,  
BY PISANELLO.



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naissance, which drew its life and inspiration so much from princes. She was to grow great by her sovereigns, so great indeed that Goethe compares her with Florence and gives her the palm. The German poet's words quoted above are put into the mouth of Leonora San Vitale and addressed to Alfonso II. more than a century later than the moment we have come to, but their praise is more properly due to the three sons and successors of Niccolò III., and especially, as Signor Carducci points out, to the first, Leonello, who initiated the great movement upon which his brothers were afterwards carried along.

Of all the "noble souls" which la Casa d'Este produced this prince's was the most sincere in its love of other noble souls and in its desire for beauty and knowledge. Leonello d'Este, who was the second son of Niccolò and Stella dall' Assassino, was one of the most happily endowed beings of an age fruitful in individuals of extraordinary physical and mental gifts. The fine sensitive profile portrayed on the medals of him wrought by Pisanello shows a spirit open to every impression of beauty, and this poetic character is confirmed by the rare invention and taste revealed in one or two sonnets of his composition, which have been preserved to this day. Leonello is set apart from his splendid contemporaries by a quality very uncommon at that time, his gentleness. No cruelty or bestial passion stain his memory. Yet he did not lack manly vigour. He had been trained in war and knightly exercises at Perugia under the great Condottiere, Braccio da Montone, to whom his father had sent him at the age of fifteen. All his life long he delighted in the chase and loved his hounds and falcons. But even in boyhood a passion for the new learning dominated him, and on his return from Perugia the seventeen-year-old prince besought his father to

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give him the famous humanist, Guarino da Verona, for his tutor.

Guarino was one of the first and most ardent of the scholars who in the fifteenth century set themselves to disentomb the literature of antiquity. From his youth up, a consuming desire for classic learning had possessed him. He was the first Italian to go to Constantinople and learn Greek at the fountain head. There he studied under Emanuel Chrysoloras and kept up a diligent search for ancient manuscripts. A legend tells how, returning with two chests full of these precious spoils and losing one of them in a shipwreck, his grief was so great that his hair turned white in a night. He had lectured in many universities with great renown, and was accounted the first teacher in Italy when, already an old man, he arrived at Ferrara in answer to the Marquis Niccolò's summons and took up a modest abode with his wife and large family.

The eager young prince greedily drank in his instruction. A tender affection soon linked the two. Guarino not only instilled learning into his pupil, but virtue also, which he considered inseparable from knowledge. Master and scholar both delighted in the study of the Bible and theology. It was Leonello d'Este who first suggested to the learned world doubts of the authenticity of certain supposed letters of St. Paul to Seneca which had gained general credence. Yet Guarino's admiration for pagan antiquity was so great that he did not scruple to approve the most shamefully immoral writings of his day because they were informed with the classic spirit. Leonello soon became one of the most cultivated men of his age, versed in Latin and Greek, law, philosophy, eloquence and poetry, and according to the Florentine Filelfo, surpassed all other princes of his time by the brightness of his learning.

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In 1442, soon after his accession, he undertook the reformation of the University. The opening words of a decree which he issued on this occasion, show the noble spirit which moved him. "It is an ancient opinion," he says, "not only of the Christians but of the Gentiles that the heavens, the sea, the earth must some day perish; in like manner as of many magnificent cities nothing but ruins levelled with the ground are seen, and Rome the *victrix* herself lies in the dust and is beheld reduced to fragments: while only the understanding of things divine and human, which we call wisdom, is not extinguished by length of years, but retains its rights in perpetuity."

It was high time that the importance of knowledge and thought should be thus proclaimed in Ferrara. So deplorable was the state of culture there that we are told no one so much as understood grammar, and teachers even of elementary knowledge were lacking. The works of Cicero were unknown, and he who only named Sallust, Cæsar, Livy, was looked upon as a wonder. The University, founded by Alberto in 1391, had been soon closed for want of money, and though Niccolò had reopened it in 1402, its languid existence had little advantaged the city. Leonello now set it upon a stable footing, and filled its chairs with the most famous lecturers in Italy. Foremost of them was Guarino, whose fame soon filled the schools to overflowing. So great was the enthusiasm his lectures inspired that neither the deepest snow nor bitterest rigours of winter could keep the students away; in the dark of early morning crowds waited outside the unopened doors. They would work day and night almost without rest. The old scholar himself, after lecturing all day, would spend the evening and far into the night in study and in teaching, gathering round him in his humble little dwelling the poor students who

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could not pay fees. He sought no gain, scorning all luxury ; so sparing was he in his diet that he had but one meal a day. He used to say that he had no time to eat or to snatch a little sleep, nor could he ever be persuaded to join the jovial gatherings to which his pupils sought to lure him. His only pleasure besides his books was his little villa on the Adige, where he was used to go in summer. Here, surrounded by his vines and olives, isolated from the world, and free from the bustle of the city, he wandered about his fields and visited his flocks, with Virgils' *Bucolics* or *Georgics* in his hand, while his wife tended the farm and performed the labours of the vintage. He would invite thither his dearest friends, promising them for dinner "fave" and "favole," beans and discourse, and warning them that he was not bidding them to a feast, but to true conviviality.

By his efforts the ignorant Ferrara was transformed into a new Athens. Report spread the fame of her learning far and wide, and scholars, not only from all parts of Italy, but from Germany, France, Hungary, England, flocked thither to attend the University.

A constant succession of great men of letters enjoyed the generous hospitality of Leonello's Court. Besides Guarino, the famous Aurispa lived long at Ferrara ; and Michele Savonarola, the Paduan physician, had settled there with his family. The Marquis's palaces were filled with the heated discussions of humanists upon fine questions of scholarship or morals, in which Leonello himself took the deepest interest. It was his admiration for the character of Cæsar which provoked the famous argument as to the respective merits of that hero and Scipio between Guarino and the Florentine, Poggio, which divided all Italy into two parties. Such were the bloodless battles in which this prince delighted. The humanists



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expended as much passion and fury in these arguments as men upon the battlefield, and were absolutely unscrupulous in their use of the weapons of words. Their jealousies and vanities were of the most naïve kind. The virtuous Guarino himself was at one time or another at fierce odds with most of his learned contemporaries.

With the dawn of learning in Ferrara the fine arts also awakened. Guarino's passion for antiquity embraced its art, and he would constantly demonstrate the nobility of painting, which he called the "sister of poetry." Leonello's sensibilities were as exquisitely alive to outward as to inward forms of beauty. As in letters, so in art, from the surrounding cities and from all parts of his dominions, the best of thought and skill flowed towards Ferrara, where it found such princely welcome, and laid the foundation of her future greatness, as the river had brought down in ages past the rich soil out of which she was formed. Roger van der Weyden came from Flanders to offer his knowledge of oil painting for the service of the Marquis, thus encouraging that little-known practice among the artists of the city. Angelo da Siena, Giacopo Bellini, the young Mantegna, worked at the Court. Above all, that exquisite artist, Vittore Pisano or Pisanello, stayed many years beside the Marquis, for whom he painted among others things the St. Antony and St. George, now in the National Gallery, and portraits of Leonello himself and of one of the princesses of Este, the former now at Bergamo, the latter in the Louvre. Inspired by such great men, the artistic spirit of the city quickly developed. Bono di Ferrara, Galasso, and Cosimo Tura, soon begin to be heard of, and under the influence of the dominant Tura an extremely characteristic school of painting was to arise and



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flourish with great reputation in this century and the early part of the sixteenth. Architecture occupied Leonello much, and he set his builders to complete and alter the palaces of his fathers, and to transform them from the medieval fortresses, which they were, into dwellings fit for a Renaissance prince. It was at his request that Leon Battista Alberti wrote his famous treatise on architecture, but Leonello did not, like Sigismondo Malatesta, commission the great architect to embody his theories in any great edifice. His temperament was of the dreamy and contemplative order, content with the intellectual grasp of things. It was in the art of living beautifully that Leonello excelled. No prince had a more delightful pleasure house for his soul than he made of the Palace of Belfiore, which lay just outside the city, surrounded by gardens. Here, in the pleasant rooms, which he built to the south, where all the winter long the sun entered, or in summer in cool halls, or garden alleys, the Marquis loved to spend his time, when he was not eagerly following the chase, his greyhound by his side. One pictures him pacing between hoary philosophers and absorbed in some grave debate, the finely-moulded head downbent as he ponders, modestly withholding his opinions out of reverence for the greater wisdom of his companions.

Leonello's own cabinet was a veritable museum of pictures, medals, antique marbles and artistic things of every kind. Above all, he gathered books, adding to the romances and missals of his father's library all the works of Greek and Latin authors, upon which he expended great sums. Copies were made for him by delicate-fingered scribes, and were richly miniatures by Zorzo da Alemagna and other most excellent artists, and bound in gorgeous covers, adorned with clasps and bosses by workmen such as that prince of goldsmiths,

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Amadio da Milano. The Marquis also opened a library for the use of students in the Convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli hard by, and his collections of books formed the nucleus of the famous library of the Dukes later.

Everything about Leonello was beautiful. No single vessel of household use but was of beautiful form and workmanship and of costly material. His very hounds and falcons wore collars of the precious metals, curiously adorned by the Milanese goldsmith, and the furniture of the horses was of equal price and beauty. Princes and nobles wore dresses of richest stuffs, studded with jewels set by Venetian craftsmen and gold work beaten and chased by the busy Amadio. Skilled embroiderers adorned them with fine needlework and printed upon them strange devices; Leonello's were covered with the symbolical conceits which he adopted as his emblems. Upon the women's gowns and the sleeves and caps of the men were worked old French mottoes from the romances of chivalry, which were still read and loved in this Court in spite of the rage for antiquity. And the beauty of the wearers matched their fine apparel. A throng of fair women adorned the Court. The Marquis's first wife, Margherita Gonzaga, died young in 1439, but she was succeeded in 1444 by Maria of Aragon, daughter of the King of Naples. And Leonello had many sisters, princesses not only skilled in the graceful arts of music and embroidery, but well instructed in the learning of the day. Parisina's two daughters understood Greek and Latin, and their mother had taught them in their babyhood to use the harp. Both were early dead; it was Ginevra's destiny to answer to her mother's house for her mother's blood, according to the old Italian saying, "Sangue chiama sangue." Sigismondo Malatesta, to

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whom she was married at fifteen, poisoned her six years later. Lucia, her twin, died a few months after her marriage in 1437 to Carlo Gonzaga. Of Niccolò III.'s other daughters, Beatrice, who was so famous for her dancing that she was called the Queen of Feasts, was twice married—to Niccolò, lord of Correggio, and after his death to Tristan Sforza. A younger princess, Bianca, grew up to win renown as a scholar and a poetess.

The Marquis governed his large household with great discretion; over the alluring train of maidens he set elderly ladies as duennas. Virtue and gentle manners ruled his Court. What a change since Niccolò III.'s day! The embarrassments, the gross passions, the squalid magnificence, the confusion of new thoughts and old beliefs, all had suddenly cleared away into the chaste, refined, almost cold atmosphere of this early Renaissance Court with its austere ideals of beauty and virtue. Leonello stands for us in the morning of the new age when men were moved by a pure joy in the long hid beauty now being uncovered to their gaze, and their sins sprang not from depravity but from the curiosity of souls awakened to a new sense of freedom and as yet unconscious of evil.

The nine fair years of this prince's reign were a shining contrast to the general state of Italy at that time. No war or bloodshed crossed them. Like his father, he played the peacemaker among his neighbour sovereigns. When he was forty years old, and before any shade had come to cross his prosperity, this fortunate prince died; one whom the gods seem truly to have loved. Over his dead body humanists and poets throughout Italy broke out into ovations and elegies full of praises of his learning and his virtues.

Borso d'Este, the third son of Niccolò and Stella dall'Assassino, who now assumed the sovereignty,

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was confronted by difficulties which Leonello had been spared. His younger brothers, Ercole and Sigismondo, Niccolò's legitimate sons, were come to manhood by this time, and there were many persons in the city who pretended that these young princes were wrongfully dispossessed of their heritage by their illegitimate brothers. They were, however, safely absent at the Court of Naples, whither Leonello had sent them to be educated, that they might be out of the way. But Leonello himself had left a son by his first wife, Margherita Gonzaga, and the claims of this young Niccolò, now fourteen years old, to the sovereignty were pressed by his mother's kindred and a strong party in Ferrara.

Legitimacy of birth was, however, of small account in the Italy of that day. Character and ability were the best claims to power, and Borso, a man of thirty-seven, grave and prudent, versed in affairs of State, was welcomed as their natural and proper lord by the bulk of the nobles and well-to-do citizens, whose fidelity he rewarded and secured by liberal favours. His beneficent air endeared him to the mass of the people, and the adherents of his younger rivals were unable to oppose his election. But they remained a danger against which the careful prince never forgot to be on his guard.

Under this new lord Ferrara entered upon the most golden moment of her Golden Age. While continual wars harassed and exhausted the rest of Italy, she was able to increase daily in riches and luxury in the sunshine of the peace which his prudence and diplomatic astuteness knew so well how to preserve. Ferrara became known throughout Italy as the "land of peace." Nor did Borso neglect to advance his power and consequence. Paul II. said of him that he accomplished more warfare without blood or cost while he was hawk-



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ing than another could do with five hundred horsemen. His counsel was continually sought by other sovereigns, and he was the arbiter of their quarrels, as his father and brother had been. Borso d'Este was very ambitious ; the glory of the House of Este was the one aim of his life. But he was no man of war, and his dream was not of territorial conquest at the price of blood and treasure, but of an advance in rank. He loved splendour and the decorative symbols of dignity, and none understood better their value in the world's esteem.

In 1452 Frederick III. visited Italy. The Marquis saw an opportunity of getting the honour he coveted from this degenerate successor of Barbarossa, whose only assertion of his ancient rights as Emperor was the bestowing of high-sounding titles and diplomas upon wealthy nobles and citizens in return for heavy fees. As lord of the Imperial fiefs of Modena and Reggio, Borso was his vassal. He received and entertained the monarch in Ferrara with lavish magnificence, and heaped upon him gifts of superb coursers and falcons. Frederick was accompanied by his secretary, the brilliant young Bishop of Siena, Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini, whose family was related to that of Borso's mother. By the help of this accomplished diplomatist, and by rich offers on his own part, the obsequious Marquis persuaded the Emperor to elevate the states of Modena and Reggio into a dukedom. On the 18th of May, 1452, Frederick solemnly invested Borso with his new dignity.

The creation of Duke Borso is one of the famous pageants of the fifteenth century. Ferrara had never seen before the like of that day. The streets were garlanded in green branches ; flowers and sweet herbs strewed all the ways. Every window and loggia was hung with brilliant cloths. Early in the morning the Emperor issued from the palace, leaning upon two

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pages and clad in the Imperial mantle of gold tissue, sewn with precious stones. Before him went heralds and trumpeters, ambassadors, princes, dukes, beneath the glorious façade of the Duomo, which is the same to-day as it was then. At the angle where the whole market-place lies before you stood a high tribune covered with painted hangings and supporting a throne arrayed in cloth of gold. As the Emperor ascended and seated himself, another procession wound into the upper end of the Piazza from behind the Cathedral, and approached in slow and stately march, four hundred knights on horseback, two by two, each one bearing a pennon of white taffeta, in sign, says the chronicler, of joy, save the two last, who carried green standards representing Borso's Imperial fiefs, and were followed by a single knight, who held aloft a great red banner symbolising Imperial Justice. A noble of the house of Bevilacqua came next carrying the naked sword of the prince in front of Borso himself, who was dressed in cloth of gold and wore jewels of inestimable splendour and worth. The horsemen, parting as they neared the throne, ranged themselves in a semicircle, through which the Marquis passed, and mounting the steps, knelt before the Emperor, with his sword-bearer and the three standard-bearers behind him. Frederick raising him, seated him beside himself and caused him to be vested in a garment of red wool and a long rose-coloured mantle lined with ermine ; a ducal beretta was set upon his head. Borso then rose, and the Emperor committed to him the three standards, the naked sword and a golden sceptre, and kissing him, declared him Duke of Modena and Reggio. Then a number of nobles were knighted by the Emperor, and the Bishop and clergy led the way to the Cathedral, where Borso swore solemn fealty to the Emperor and offered him a jewel of enormous



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value. He promised also an annual tribute of four thousand golden florins, but this was soon diminished, and before long was dropped.

The great doings in the city of the Po were reported throughout the civilised world. Duke Borso's name

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was spoken everywhere, and he became known as one of the most magnificent princes of the day. The Soldan of Babylon and the King of Tunis sent him gifts, supposing him to be the greatest monarch in Italy. In his one figure centres the whole brightness of that fortunate time in Ferrara. The system of government of the Estensi, controlling every spring of life in their States, drew all the industry and talent of the people to the service and glorification of the sovereign. His subjects regarded him as a sort of god, "il Divo Borso"; they subscribed themselves the dogs and slaves of His Excellency. Never was he seen clothed in meaner stuff than cloth of gold; the gold collar round his neck was worth 70,000 ducats. A throng of young knights of the noblest houses among his vassals attended him, splendidly arrayed. Seven hundred horses of the purest blood filled the Duke's stables, and his hounds and falcons were the finest in all Italy. Princes and noble guests were received by him with a splendour hardly ever seen before, none were allowed to depart without rich presents, and his liberality was lauded by all, from monarch to the meanest messenger that brought him good news, or the most insignificant of the pages who fitted the jesses to his hawks. To all who could serve him in any way his generosity was unbounded; he lavished houses, lands and wealth upon his friends and favourites.

The ostentatious pride of Borso's existence was ennobled by the rare artistic genius of the Quattrocento. Piero della Francesca, who stayed at the Court for some years, Cosimo Tura, Francesco Cossa and a host of others frescoed his palaces and chapels, painted altar-pieces, designed tapestries, and decorated all his equipments. It is the service and homage rendered then by such spirits as these that makes the Italian princes of this age heroic. Art and learning looked to



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them for life, and it is to their glory that, in spite of the vices bred in them by despotism, they were inspired by so noble an enthusiasm for the beautiful, and that their very vanity was controlled by fine taste. Borso's generosity to men of genius was great. He welcomed them with warmest hospitality. The old humanists, Guarino and Aurispa, lived out the end of their long lives—both were nonagenarians—under his patronage, and among the citizens themselves a number of brilliant scholars had sprung up, whose graceful Latin verses resounded through all cultivated Italy.

The Duke's liberality won him the enthusiastic praise of scholars and poets; his name was chanted in numberless verses. But Borso d'Este was no scholar himself—"Fortune, the enemy of every virtuous man, has not willed to add to thy other rare ornaments the ornament of letters," writes Carlo di San Zorzo. He preferred indeed the chase and the feast to books, and loved splendid array better than the pleasures of scholarship. But he was carried along by the enthusiasm of the day, and the reputation of a Mæcenas was necessary to his glory as a fifteenth-century prince, and the world, dazzled by outward show, held him in far higher esteem than the more modest Leonello. Nor had Borso a fine appreciation of art like his brother; he valued it only as a means of adornment for himself and his House. The vanity of this prince was as great as his prudence. But it was redeemed by the touch of naïveté, which appears in all the sins and weaknesses of these Renaissance characters. Borso loved to figure in the classic character of a just and benevolent ruler, the father of his people. Every morning he would go forth from his palace, attended by his counsellors and his courtiers, and walk among the citizens in the Piazza, and there listen to the grievances of anyone who chose to approach him,

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sometimes himself pronouncing judgment on the spot. One day a poor merchant came and reminded him tremblingly that certain monies due to him for goods supplied to the ducal wardrobe had not been paid. The Duke bade the man cite him before the magistrate for the debt. The poor suppliant was turning away, supposing that the prince was but jesting with him, but Borso insisted, and in due course the judge having been warned as to what he was to do, the prince was condemned for the debt. Then calling the officer who was responsible for the payment having been neglected, Borso reproved him severely for bringing his lord to such disgrace and commanded him to make instant satisfaction to the merchant. Another time the Duke pardoned a delinquent at the request of the man's mother, a poor woman who had once given him some mushrooms to eat when he had met her by accident in the woods, and to whom he had promised a grace should she ever be in need of one.

With these and other instances of magnanimity, the Duke won the genuine affection of his people. Moreover, he supplied them with grain during a famine, adjusted the taxation more fairly, and protected the industries of the city. Early in his reign he reformed the statutes, a crying necessity. He was active in trying to control the river, and summoned the best engineers to drain marshes, dig new channels and improve embankments.

But Borso's first thought was for himself and his House. His dominions were like personal estates and all improvements were for his own benefit. The labour and oxen of the peasants were regularly impressed for his works. He used the most oppressive methods of getting money. The taxes were farmed out twice a year to the highest bidder. The sale of salt, meat, fish, fruit and vegetables were his monopoly, and all

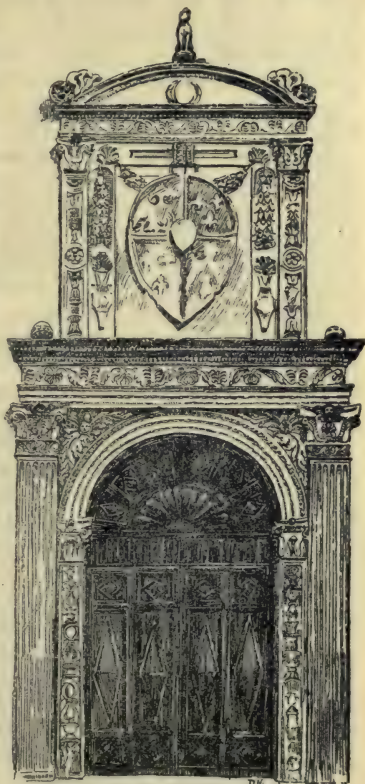
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the ground around the walls was used by this royal market gardener to grow his produce. Salt was heavily taxed. Though in outward style a second Trajan, the Duke exhorted his Ministers in secret to extract all the juice they could from his subjects, "quel più sugo se potesse." His financial system was carried to a nice perfection. Even the vices of his people were turned to his profit and heavy fines were imposed for swearing or gambling. To speak ill of the Duke was to be stripped of everything. Spies were encouraged by receiving a third of the fines of those whom they had denounced. A host of them pervaded the society of Ferrara. Borso enriched himself at the expense of all whom he suspected of hostility to himself, visiting them with fines and confiscations on the least pretext.

By these methods he was able to support his splendid liberality and extravagant manner of life. Princes came from all parts to visit him, glad to exchange war and intrigue for a while for the hospitality of so generous a prince and for the joyous scenes of this city, where the only strife was the mock combat of the lists, the jealousies of lute players or poets, or the rivalries of knights for the favour of some of the fairest women in Italy. A proverb current in the city at that time ran : "He who would pass from one world to another, let him hear Pierobono sound the guitar ; he who would find the heavens opened, let him try the liberality of Duke Borso ; he who would see Paradise on earth let him see Madonna Beatrice in the dance." The customs of chivalry were more in fashion than ever, and under this unlettered sovereign Homer and Virgil had to make way for the histories of Lancelot du Lac, of Tristan and Isolde. Borso gave enormous sums for copies of the romances and had them adorned with exquisite miniatures. Chroniclers devised ingenious

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genealogies for the Estensi starting from the Knights of the Round Table, and poets found ancestors for them among the Paladins of Charlemagne. The Court reflected the whole strange compound of ideas characteristic of the time; religion, chivalry, pagan learning made a quaint fellowship in men's minds, and enriched art and letters with a three-fold inspiration. When Æneas Sylvius revisited Ferrara as Pope Pius II. in 1460, the chief priest of Christendom was greeted by representations of pagan gods and goddesses on either bank of the river as he descended in his bucentaur to the music of flutes and pifferi.



DOORWAY OF PALAZZO SCHIFANOIA.

A wonderful record of the Ferrara of this time remains in the frescoes of Schifanoia, painted about 1469.



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There, overwatched by the deities and astronomic symbols of the months in their yearly procession, we see Duke Borso in the garb and circumstances of his daily life, attended by his nobles, listening to suppliants, giving audience to ambassadors or going forth to the chase with his falcon on his wrist, while the labour of the peasants goes on in the fields around him. The Duke is the centre of all. No chronicle can describe to us the immense dignity and the pompous vanity of the kindly old tyrant as they are shown in the transparent images of the painter; and the dreams and fantastic notions of the age, the innocence mixed with a new self-consciousness are reflected in the mythological conceits and the delicious groups of youths and maidens which enshrine him.

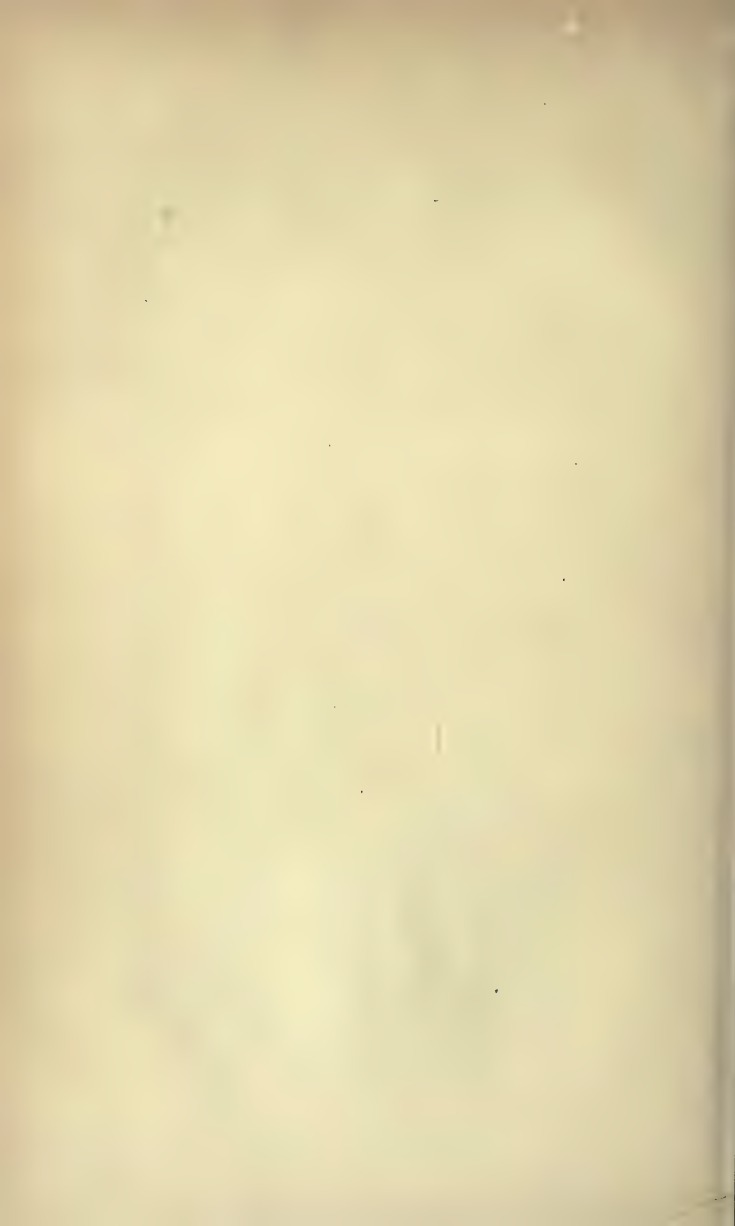
A voice was not wanting to remind this gay world of its follies, and Girolamo Savonarola had a forerunner in his grandfather, the old physician Michele, who was wont to rebuke his fellow-citizens because they loved better to hear romances sung than vespers. Nor was the peace unclouded, as in Leonello's days.

Borso, not content with the Dukedom conferred on him by the Emperor, was bent on obtaining the same dignity in respect to Ferrara. This depended upon the Pope, to propitiate whom he spent every diplomatic resource, and not only entertained Pius II. and later on Paul II. at great cost, but even abandoned his cherished neutrality more than once. In 1466 he supported the cause of Luca Pitti against Piero de' Medici, and sent his forces to join the Venetians against Florence, in order to please the Pope. The war quickly died out, but it left Borso with revengeful enemies in the Medici. There was besides in Ferrara itself a party hostile to him, and ready to assist his political adversaries by plotting in favour of Ercole and of Niccolò. Their schemes were frustrated, however, by the Duke's



BORSO AND HIS JESTER SCOCOLA, FRESCO BY FRANCESCO COSSA  
(PALAZZO SCHIFANOIA).

[Anderson, Rome.



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watchfulness, and many were sent at different times to the scaffold. Borso treated the young princes themselves with a wise and generous confidence, which won him their fidelity. Leonello's son, who hoped to succeed his uncle, held high office and was next in honour to the Duke himself at Court. This prince is described by a chronicler as "a polished knight, gracious, beautiful and proud." But he was both weak and dissolute. Ercole, who was winning fresh renown as a warrior, was more to be feared. The Duke recalled him, nevertheless, from exile and made him Governor of Modena. The sons of Niccolò III. showed ever a praiseworthy loyalty to one another, inspired perhaps by affection, but more probably by prudence and a regard for the interests of their House. Borso never married, that he might not add to the complications likely to arise between Ercole and Niccolò on his death by leaving an heir. Ercole, on his part, made no attempt to overthrow his brother and possess himself of the throne which his partisans told him was rightly his. In 1469 Piero de' Medici and the Duke of Milan sought with rich offers to draw him into a league against Borso. He was to have the command of their united forces, with a great stipend, his brother was to be dispossessed and the dominion transferred to him, with the addition of other territories conquered by the league. Ercole, however, chose the wiser course of revealing the whole plot to the intended victim, and the only tragic consequence of this affair was the ruin of an unfortunate family of nobles, the Pii of Carpi; six brothers, vassals of Borso, and his nephews through their mother Margherita d'Este. The Duke had offended them by giving his own sister Bianca in marriage to Galeotto Pico della Mirandola, who was already betrothed to a daughter of their house, and Giovanni Lodovico Pio, who had taken service with the



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Duke of Milan, had undertaken to be the ambassador of the Sforza and of Piero de' Medici to Ercole. On the revelation of the plot by that prince, the unlucky envoy was seized and carried to Ferrara, where he was tried on a charge of conspiring against the Duke's life. There is no evidence of the truth of this accusation. Nevertheless he was condemned and beheaded. His brothers, who appear to have been innocent of any



EMBLEM OF BORSO D'ESTE IN CHURCH OF THE CERTOSA.

knowledge of the conspiracy, were also arrested in their castle, dragged from one stronghold to another, and finally thrown into the dungeons of Castello Vecchio. There, through the machinations of their cousins, Leonello and Marco Pio, who coveted their dominions and were high in Borso's favour, they lay for years, and their possessions were confiscated and conferred on their kinsmen. One of the brothers, Giovanni Marsiglia, beguiled his captivity by writing a long narrative in verse of their woeful case, in which he describes the horrors of his prison and in his rage curses the usurping cousins. "The third shall not

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enjoy the fruits," he cries. He lived to see his words fulfilled.

It was long before Borso was able to obtain the distinction for which he had ceaselessly striven and schemed. An agreement was at last made with Paul II., who consented to raise Ferrara to the rank of a duchy. Early in 1471 Borso set forth, accompanied by a stupendously pompous train of nobles and attendants, to receive the coveted honour, and on Easter Day he was created Duke of Ferrara by the Pope in St. Peter's with great ceremonial. He came home only to die. Rome had bestowed upon him, in addition to endless honours and enjoyments, a mortal sickness.

The content with which he bequeathed the great position which he had won for his house was clouded by fears for its future. Already the two claimants for the succession, Ercole and Niccolò, were making ready for a struggle, and the last sound heard by the lord of the "land of peace" was the noise of factions rising, arms preparing, and troops arriving from Venice, Mantua and Milan, to the support of one or the other of the pretendants.

## CHAPTER V

### *Pleasure and Peril*

“ Ercole or vien . . .

Questo è il signor di cui non so esplicarmi  
se fia maggior la gloria o in pace o in armi.”

*Orl. Fur.*, Canto III.

“ **N**ON è più il tempo di Borso ” was soon to be the burden of Ferrara, and to pass into a proverb.

Yet the menace of civil war passed away. Immediately on his brother's death, Ercole was proclaimed Duke, while his Venetian allies hovered close by in their ships, and the adherents of the less ready Niccolò, whom Borso before his death had sent to Mantua, hid themselves or fled to their lord without striking a blow in his favour. The scene grew radiant again around the triumphant figure of the new Duke as, robed in brocade of gold, the diadem on his brow and the sceptre in his hand, and mounted upon a superb charger caparisoned in purple and gold, he rode through the streets, followed by a far-stretching train of nobles and citizens.

Ercole d'Este was a man of noble and attractive presence, in the prime of life. He had grown up at a royal court, the companion of a king's son, and was perfect in all knightly graces and accomplishments. His courtesy and valour in arms were a favourite theme of the poets and novelists of Ferrara. He had fought with renown in the service of John of Anjou against King Ferrante, for whom he had cherished

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hatred ever since his boyish days at the Court of Naples. At the battle of the Molinella against the Florentines in 1467 his timely aid was said to have saved the Venetian general Colleone from complete defeat by the Florentines.

Soon after his accession the new Duke reconciled himself with the King of Naples and obtained the hand of Ferrante's daughter Eleanora in marriage. In June 1473 he despatched a noble company to fetch the bride. As they returned with her, they passed through Rome, where the princess was entertained with extravagant splendour by Cardinal Pietro Riario, the Pope's nephew. Meanwhile the Duke was sweeping and garnishing his city, adorning his palace and castle with frescoes and marble balconies and loggias, and calling upon all the artistic skill of Ferrara to surround the coming of "Madama" with beauty. Cosimo Tura, grown old in the service of the Dukes, had painted the portrait of Ercole's natural daughter Lucrezia, which was sent as a graceful offering to the young bride, had designed the exquisite tapestry with which her bed was to be pavilioned, and adorned the vessels of silver for her table. Other artists decorated triumphal arches, bucentaurs, banners, and even designed the sugar castles and monsters which were to furnish the feast. For her reception the streets were canopied with brilliant stuffs stretched from roof to roof, and she rode robed in cloth of gold, her black hair flowing on her shoulders, beneath endless triumphal arches, to the music of pipes and tabors, while allegoric groups, representing the seven planets, were ranged along the way. The nuptial feasts continued for a whole week. Ambassadors and their trains filled the city, every day there were jousts in the Piazza, and banquets in the great Sala of the Palace, where the people crowded in to gaze at the



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Duke and his beautiful bride, and the evenings were spent in dancing, while halls and gardens resounded with the voices of the poets celebrating the beauty and virtue of Eleanora.

Under Duke Ercole I. the splendid literary and artistic culture of Ferrara reached its height. Round the new sovereign there gathered a society distinguished by the finest taste and scholarship, and by a stately grace of manners such as could grow up only in an old feudal Court—an aristocracy both of blood and of letters, formed by the noble families which owed allegiance to the Estensi, among whom were names great in Italy, the Pii of Carpi, the Boiardi, Strozzi, Ariosti, Contrari, and many others. A charming intimacy prevailed between them and their lords, to whom they were bound not only by loyalty but by a community of interests and enthusiasms. The University was at the height of its fame. Great scholars filled its chairs, such as Battista Guarino, whom Poliziano lauds as the first professor of letters of his day, Niccolò Leonicensi, the great physician and Greek scholar, Giorgio Valla, Pellegrino Prisciano, Ercole's learned librarian, and others of great distinction, among them the old Ferrarese Lodovico Carbone, who had edified the Court with his learned orations and amused it with his ridiculous vanity and pretensions for many years. The schools were attended by brilliant students from all parts. Aldo Manutio was studying here, and hither came Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, when a youth of some sixteen years, and astounded his master, Battista Guarino, by his great gifts and already prodigious learning.

The study of medicine, philosophy and jurisprudence flourished here, but of all the liberal arts, poetry was the one to which Ferrara was most devoted. The city abounded in singers. Foremost was Tito

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Vespasiano Strozzi, son of the noble Florentine Nanni Strozzi, who had commanded the armies of Niccolò III., and had settled his branch of the house in Ferrara. Tito, born in 1420, was the most accomplished writer of Latin verse in Italy. There were many others whose skill in weaving odes and elegies had won them great praise, besides a whole host of obscure versifiers. It was not only a love of the Muse which inspired them; a graceful trick of imitating Ovid and Tibullus was the road to preferment and honour. All chanted their loves, flattered their prince, celebrated and slandered one another in the academic style which fashion prescribed, and the noise of their rival harmonies filled the city as the nightingale's music does in spring. An envious Modenese bard makes a less flattering comparison, likening their numberless voices to the frogs that abound in the Ferrarese fields:

“ . . . Nam tot Ferrara vates  
Quot ranas tellus ferrariensis habet.”

Yet it was not in the classic tongue that Ferrara was to achieve her greatest triumphs. The “*sermone materno*,” fortunately for Italian literature, had never fallen out of use at this Court, the lords of which were flattered by the sound of Latin, but looked for amusement to the language which they could more easily understand. To the favour of the Estensi for the mother tongue was owed in great part that splendid Ferrarese literature now about to burst forth, which was to place this city in the very forefront of the Italian Renaissance.

The poet most favoured by Duke Ercole was his vassal, Matteo Maria Boiardo, Count of Scandiano, who, though a fine scholar and steeped in the culture

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of the day, composed chiefly in Italian. Boiardo is one of the greatest poets that Italy has produced. He was the first to take the old romantic tales, dear and familiar still to Ferrara, and weave them into the new epic of chivalry, which, taken up and perfected later by the greater genius and more modern spirit of Ariosto, was to embody the peculiar spirit and culture of this city in a splendid and enduring monument of literature.

Boiardo was born about 1434 at his father's Castle of Scandiano, close to Reggio. His mother was a Ferrarese lady, sister of Tito Strozzi the poet, and he was brought up chiefly in Ferrara. His family were old vassals and courtiers of the Estensi, and Matteo must have been early familiar with the Court. But in spite of its fascinations, he loved to dwell at Scandiano, governing his small dominions with a paternal mildness, pursuing the chase amidst the forests and hills, or wandering in the wide pastures where the Secchia winds, singing of his heroes the Estensi, of gods and goddesses, Romulus and Remus, Camillus and Scipio Africanus. Here in summer-houses, hidden in quiet groves or built on the brink of the glassy stream, wherein the grasses, the poplars, the low undulating hills mirrored themselves, he would pass sweet hours with his love, Antonia Caprara, and a bevy of damsels of the Court, reciting eclogues or singing amorous lyrics to the lute. The flowers, the stars, all the scenes of that fair and placid nature are reflected in his love songs; he compares his lady to them and finds that she surpasses all in beauty. He desires never to be loosed from the golden tresses that have bound him in so sweet a place. Or he recalls the day when first he was enamoured, the feast where love rained from the heavens, rejoicing all gentle souls and breathing sweet fire everywhere; where ardent youths contended

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in friendly jousts and ladies sported in the graceful dance or sang sweet songs, and all around were joyful lovers, pleasant folk and jocund revelry. But there comes a day when his burden changes; goodness and courtesy are banished from the world, the age is grown wicked and unkind. His love is unfaithful to him, she is false, perfidious, a traitress, and for her sake he charges all women with inconstancy and vanity. Alone in the woods at twilight he sings sadly of his cruel mistress, and when the day returns again on which they met, so changed is he by scorn and anger, so full of anguish, that he recognises the day and not himself. He sorrowfully concludes that the man is altogether mad and vain who expects joy on earth. In 1471 he was called from his complaining to join the grand company which escorted Duke Borso to Rome, where still amid the splendid feasts his heart flamed with the thought of the fair head and angelic countenance of his mistress. Nevertheless, after he returned, he married another lady, Taddea Gonzaga, and sang no more the fickle Antonia—but addressed himself to his great work, the *Orlando Innamorato*. In this too love is the all-dominant influence. The amorous themes of the old British legends are mingled for the first time with the war adventures of the Charlemagne cycle, and Orlando, or Roland, the great Paladin of France, appears like Lancelot and Tristan, the victim of love. The poem tells the story of the hero's fatal passion for the enchantress Angelica, weaving it in with a thousand episodes of love and war gleaned from the rich stores of old Turpin and adorned with the glamour of magic and sorcery. One can fancy with what delight the Court listened to these beautiful "ottave rime" which the poet would recite to while away the hot hours of the summer day, or during the long journeys from one splendid villa to another, in luxurious



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bucentaurs, as they glided slowly between the green and flowery shores. To us the charm of the poem lies in its reflection of the picturesque life of those very listeners. The spirit of it is of the poet's own time; we seem to be looking at the knights and ladies of the fifteenth century frescoes, in splendid stiff array, who wear a sweet simplicity of expression which shows that the childhood of the new era is not yet worn out, and pass their lives tilting, conversing, dancing, amid an ideal landscape of little hills, flowery pastures and winding streams.

While composing his great poem, Boiardo used to retire during the summer heat to a solitary tower buried in the forest, where he could meditate at peace in the eternal silence. Traditions of him still linger there, and a peasant's house, where he is said to have written, is called to this day the *Ca di Conte*. It is related that he sought names for his knights among the hills, and that when the triumphant appellation of Rodomonte, which has given a word to the world, was discovered for the boastful Saracen hero, all the bells of Scandiano were set ringing for joy.

About the same time, another Ferrarese poet, ✓ Francesco Bello, called *il Cieco* because he was blind, was composing the romantic epic of *Mambriano*, and the young knight, Niccolò da Correggio, son of the Queen of Feasts, Beatrice d'Este, was winning renown with the lyre like a royal troubadour of old, as well as with the sword in tourney and battle.

The centre of this melodious crew, its inspiration and idol, was Duke Ercole himself. He was no poet, nor had he much scholarship, being a man "more exercised in arms than in studies." But his fervour for culture and for all that was beautiful and graceful in life, his praise and eager encouragement of genius, fired those about him with enthusiasm. No prince ever favoured

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the Muses as this one did. From his boyhood Ercole was an eager reader, especially of history. He enriched the splendid ducal library with no less than one thousand translations of classic authors. Herodotus and the Greek historians were made "to speak Italian in his presence," and by his generosity in lending the precious codices collected by Leonello and Borso to the men of letters at his Court he did a great deal to aid the study of Greek and Latin in Ferrara. In his all-embracing curiosity, his love for new things, the vitality of his enthusiasms, Ercole d'Este reflects that wonderful Renaissance age, with its unbounded capacity for joy, at the moment when its ecstasy was at its height, untouched as yet by satiety. Round such a one the poets naturally crowded. Boiardo adored his "gentle lord," whose valorous deeds he celebrates in his eclogues, and Tito Strozzi and the Latinists echoed these praises in carefully studied metres.

No less homage was offered at the feet of the young Duchess, who gave a warm and kindly encouragement to the poets and was in intimate relations with many of them. Eleanora had a noble love for the arts which, as well as letters, flourished under Ercole. Seventy painters were employed at the Court. Tura was still chief amongst them, with Baldassarre d'Este, while younger men of the school were now winning distinction. The Duke used their talent principally in decorative work. He had not much appreciation for lofty and serious art. It was in living beautifully that he, like Leonello, excelled.

Yet beneath all this apparent prosperity trouble lurked. The pleasant hours of the Court itself were not unclouded. The gracious presence of Eleanora kept in check the evil passions always ready to break forth within this princely house, and the splendid train of brothers and nephews that attended upon the

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Duke were to all appearance his loyal and loving subjects. But a real danger threatened in Niccolò d'Este, who from his refuge in Mantua was intriguing ceaselessly against Ercole. His partisans had refused to return to Ferrara, though Ercole had proclaimed the goodness and benignity of his nature and that nothing was more proper in a prince than to forgive offences. The Duke tried by every means to rid himself of the danger. He sent his chamberlain, Niccolò Ariosto, unworthy father of the great poet, to Mantua with secret instructions to kill the prince. The ambassador bribed a seneschal to mingle poison with his master's viands, but in the very act the man was seized with sudden confusion and confessed the intended crime. He was hanged, but the wicked chamberlain escaped safely, and the Duke himself suffered no worse consequence of his treachery than disappointment at its failure.

Meanwhile the lot of the Duke's poorer subjects was a hard and painful one. The spirit of the Renaissance was little in sympathy with the rude and ignorant masses, whose only use was to provide the means of luxury for their lords and masters. The Ferrarese were ground down with taxation. Duke Ercole needed money and ever more money. His passion for building, for gorgeous spectacles and pompous journeyings was insatiable. He compelled his officers to extravagance, regardless of the sufferings of the people. Thousands of peasants were forced to work for years on the vast pleasaunces and hunting-grounds which he laid out, and the harvest could not be garnered or the grapes pruned for lack of labourers. The ducal monopolies were more oppressive than ever before. The highest offices were regularly sold, and the purchasers repaid themselves by robbing the people. No wrong could find redress without gold, nor could

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appeal be made to the Duke, who granted no audiences, but retired behind his great Ministers, on whom fell all the hate of the populace. At the same time great disorder prevailed, crimes of every sort went unchecked, and Ferrara, it was said, was a den of thieves. Shops were sacked and murders committed in the streets in open daylight with impunity. The only folks who prospered were the usurers. The city was full of Jews, and many of the nobles too grew rich by money-lending.

The people were the less able to bear the exactions of the Duke because of the misfortunes that befell the city at this time. The harvests failed. In 1474 the Court itself lacked bread, and the poor were feeding upon acorns and the bark of trees. The river overflowed and wasted the fields again and again. The exhalations of the sodden earth bred disease in the weakened people and a dreadful contagion seized them. Thousands perished. A wild terror possessed everyone, and persons suspected of plague were hounded like mad dogs from the habitations of men.

But the Ferrarese could do better without bread than without amusement, and though they starved, their eyes were fed by the bright spectacle of the Court life, passed much in the open air and amongst them. They crowded to watch the jousts, and to scramble for the remains of the banquets of sugar delicacies brought out to refresh the guests; when a great personage arrived in state they had the curious privilege of despoiling him of his horse and its equipments. For every occasion of rejoicing they made great bonfires in the Piazza, and often made "saccomano" of the public offices, burning the books and benches to show their joy. When in the wild Carnival days the Duke went round the city at night at the head of a crowd of young nobles, with musicians carrying torches, to collect his



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“ventura” or “luck” in the shape of viands, delicacies and wine set out for him before each door, they followed and picked up some crumbs of the spoils. Or at the May Day revels, when the prince and his friends rode round decked in the flower of the white-thorn, they danced after, singing for joy of the blue skies and returning summer. The Duke ordained continuous sports, giving prizes for horse and donkey races, and races of men, women and children. St. George’s Day in especial was celebrated with every kind of amusement. A feverish gaiety seems to have got hold of the community. The calmness which had chastened the days of Duke Borso were gone. The Unicorn was no longer the emblem of the sovereign, but the Diamond, in which all the hues of life flame. Corruption and licence reigned in the gay city, and the clergy, who should have reproved it, were among the worst sinners. Flood, pestilence and famine were ever threatening, and other dangers were approaching the “land of peace.” But the fear of to-morrow only lent a savour to the enjoyment of the present moment; prince and people laughed and rioted in Piazza and street, while from far-off Florence was wafted the wild Carnival song :

“Quant’ è bella giovinezza  
che si fugge tuttavia !  
chi può esser lieto, sia !  
di doman non c’ è certezza.”

But there was one in Ferrara whose soul was wrung with grief at the spectacle around him. At this time a dark, hard-featured youth might have been seen passing in and out of a house which still stands, though greatly altered, in the street beyond San Francesco. His figure was more like a shadow than a living man; his brow was already furrowed by deep

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lines of thought, and his face so sharpened by long watches and continual fastings that but for the eyes that flamed beneath the dark brows it might have been a skeleton's. The house was that of old Michele Savonarola, the physician, now dead, and this was his grandson, Girolamo. The young man in his sombre garb was a strange contrast to the joyous and gaily-caparisoned crowds of young courtiers and students who thronged the streets, and his avoidance of company and feasts, his habit of contemplation, his preference of vespers to romances, of Thomas Aquinas to pagan philosophers, made him still more peculiar.

Yet Girolamo Savonarola was a true child of Ferrara; he too loved music and song, but, instead of love poems or ribald choruses, he composed hymns full of disconsolate thoughts and tuned his lute to such sad melodies that they brought tears to the eyes of his hearers. To the young Savonarola the world was "sotto-sopra" (upside down), full of misery and of the iniquity of men, and the age was come to such a pass that there was no more to be found anyone who did good. He saw virtue obscured and morals extinguished, vice triumphant; him blessed who lived by robbery and fed on the blood of others and spoiled widows and infants in swaddling bands. The blasphemies of his fellow-citizens filled him with horror, and the cries of the poor and the orphans, which no one heeded, cut him to the heart. It is indeed a black and dismal reverse to this splendid Ferrara which the sweeping denunciations of this passionate and single nature present to us. His serious vision penetrated through the glamour and beauty of the surface to what was rotten beneath. The name of God of Peace, given by flattering courtiers to Duke Borso, must have struck as horrible profanity upon the ears of the boy, who abhorred the

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pagan fashions of the day, knowing but one God, and for whom the peace was but the mask of shame and cruelty.

It is strange that this light-hearted city should have bred the sternest and saddest spirit of the age, the prophet who was to denounce wrath upon her dearest joys. Yet perhaps no other place could have produced him, no other was so complete an embodiment of the evils which, searing themselves into his soul at its most sensitive age, developed their own antidote. Nor was Ferrara unused to such contrast of thought as Savonarola represented. He had been foreshadowed by the strong fits of repentance which had continually seized her in the midst of her sins. No people were more prone to religious heats, and he who long afterwards sternly ordered the destruction of vanities must have seen, one Lenten day in 1474 in his native city, the citizens hurrying with masks, false hair, cards, unseemly pictures, and all the apparatus of worldly pleasures, and at the bidding of Fra Michele of Milan, the preacher of the Quaresima sermons, heaping them into a great burning pyre in the midst of the market-place.

Girolamo Savonarola was born in 1452. In his early childhood he had learnt at the knee of his grandfather, Michele, whose admonitions had developed the kindred spirit of the boy. Girolamo's father, Niccolò, was a typical courtier, idle and extravagant, and high in the favour of the Duke. But his mother, Elena Bonacossi, a Mantuan lady, was of noble and serious mind. The pair had several children, and the third son, Girolamo, they desired should follow his grandfather's profession and uphold the honour of the family at the Court. But the boy's thoughts, even while he studied the scholastic philosophy which was the medical training of the day,

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turned another way, and still more when he had once visited the Court with his father, where he could never be persuaded to go again. His soul had sickened at the luxury, the flattery, the careless laughter. Once only he was allured from the path towards which he was tending by the desire of earthly joy, and his spirit turned to an object which might have bound him to the world. The palace adjoining Casa Savonarola was that of the Strozzi family. Girolamo saw and loved a maiden of this house, and life promised him a new undreamt of sweetness. But when after a while the youth dared to declare his love, he was met by a cold rebuff, a Savonarola was not of noble enough birth for a Strozzi. From that moment the young man had done with the world. A word which he never would reveal, uttered by a friar in a sermon, finally determined him to seek the life which alone could satisfy his rage for humiliation and privation, and yield him that ecstasy which he sought, like his ardent countrymen, but, unlike them, in pain, not in joy. Yet for a whole year after he had resolved to take the cowl he lingered in his home, withheld by the fear of grieving his parents, whom he loved as only such a heart could. His will, however, overcame love. But he dared not manifest his mind to them before he parted, lest his heart should burst with grief and the act which he knew must be done should be prevented. On the eve of the Feast of St. George the young man sat singing to his lute, and his voice thrilled with such unspeakable sadness that his mother cried out in an anguish of foreboding: "My son, this is the sign of parting." The next day, when all had gone forth to join the frolics, he wrote a letter to his father, which he placed among some books, and taking a little bundle of necessaries, stepped out of his paternal home for the last time. He made his way on foot to



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Bologna and there entered the Dominican convent, where, set at his own request the meanest and hardest tasks, he found at last a measure of peace. Like San Francesco, he began his career by disregarding the duty of obedience to parents. His letter of farewell to his father is full of grief and tears, but beneath all its protestations appears the strong and steady will of one who before all others must obey himself. In this, and still more in the little treatise called *Del Dispregio del Mondo*, which he left behind him, he drew up a tremendous indictment against the world. It carries the same message, the same prophecy of wrath which he was one day to thunder forth from the pulpit of Sta. Maria de' Fiori.

Thus Savonarola passed out of Ferrara into the great world where he was to find fulfilment. He returned but once, in 1482, when he was sent to preach the Lent sermons. Like the prophets, he was not recognised in his own country. His style was too rough, and his matter too simple and honest for ears accustomed to be tickled by the fine web of scholastic disputation or amused by coarse harangues. As yet his compelling power of speech was dormant. But he could already inspire awe, and it was on this occasion that one day, as he was journeying on the river, he rebuked with so great force a party of soldiers who were blaspheming and gambling, without respect for his habit, that they fell down at his feet and repented of their sins.

The presage of woe which this strange youth left behind as he shook the dust of his native city from his feet was soon fulfilled. Plagues, earthquakes and water floods did not cease to admonish Ferrara, and in 1476 a blow came at last from the hidden enemy, Niccolò d'Este. The Duke's fears had been lulled by the long quiet, and though warned that an attempt

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was to be made he took no heed. On the 1st of September he was gone to his Palace of Belriguardo, some miles from the city. The noonday quiet was upon the streets as a fleet of barges laden with hay and straw floated down the river and stopped beneath Castel Tedaldo. From beneath the straw stole out 700 well-armed soldiers, led by Niccolò d'Este himself. They entered through a place in the walls which was being repaired, and pressed hastily up the Via di San Domenico, shouting Niccolò's war-cry, "Vela, Vela, the sail, the sail." In a moment all was clamour, confusion and terror. A few voices echoed the cry of Vela, but so little stomach had the citizens for revolt, that the one thought of most was to hide themselves till the issue had declared itself. Niccolò's old guardian, Count Rinaldo del Sacrato, slipped out of his palace unseen, having bade his people say he was not at home. The very guards of the city sought refuge in the Cathedral, where the priests at the altars let the chalice fall from their hands and fled into their innermost places. Bells rang out from every tower. The cry of "Marco" was heard, and a voice ran that 14,000 Venetians were coming to support Niccolò. The Duke's brothers, Rinaldo and Sigismondo, shut themselves up in Castello Vecchio, with the bridges drawn up, and the young Duchess, terrified by the noise, leapt from her sick-bed in the Palace with her new-born son Alfonso in her arms, and, followed by her women with the little princesses Isabella and Beatrice, fled into the Castle by the covered way lately built by her husband.

The soldiers, meeting no opposition, began drinking and plundering, while the Pretender, seating himself in the deserted Piazza, called upon the citizens to acknowledge him their lord. But none answered; those who had promised him support had melted away

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in the panic. As he sat there, a missile flung from a window stretched one of his followers dead beside him. A cry of "Diamante, Diamante" (the device of Duke Ercole), was heard far off, and a body of citizens, led by Rinaldo and Sigismondo, who had dared after a time to emerge from the Castle, came charging suddenly upon the scattered "Veleschi" and drove them in confusion into the Piazza. Niccolò did not wait for the enemy, but flew like the wind to his boats, and embarked with his immediate attendants, leaving the rest to their fate. They surrendered at once, and the rash and foolish enterprise utterly collapsed.

The fate of the poor-spirited rebels is the saddest part of the tale. The prince himself, mounting the river with Sigismondo and his archers in pursuit, was stopped by armed peasants and, escaping on the shore, got embarrassed in the morasses and was captured. Meanwhile the Duke, returning from the chase, was met by hot messengers with the news that the city was occupied by 14,000 Veleschi. Turning round, he abandoned the reins on his horse's neck and galloped at full speed, never stopping until he reached Lugo. But being warned here of the end of the tumult, he returned next day to Ferrara, entering the city in great dignity amid cries of "Diamante," which the people offered up with enthusiasm.

Before many hours had passed, the bodies of a score of prisoners were swinging from the battlements of Castello Vecchio and the Palazzo della Ragione. At dead of night Niccolò was conducted across the Castle moat and down into the dismal dungeons already consecrated as a temple of sacrifice for his house, and there beheaded. Next morning he was buried with princely honours in the family tomb in San Francesco. More than 500 people perished as

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the price of this weak prince's ambition. An aged servant of his, Maestro Luca, a cook, was offered his life if he would cry "Viva il Diamante." He cried "Viva la Vela" and died. A host of others were condemned to the loss of a limb or an eye and were portioned out by the Duke among his friends and to various convents, who were to get ransoms for them.

Duke Ercole breathed free at last. But worse trouble was coming. The greed of Sixtus IV. was setting all Italy aflame. A general war broke out in 1497, in consequence of the Pazzi conspiracy against the Medici, of which the Pope had been the instigator. The Duke of Ferrara entered the league of Florence and Milan against the Church and Naples, and was appointed Captain-General of the army, thus drawing upon himself the enmity of Sixtus, who, when his designs against the Medici were defeated by the reconciliation of Florence and Naples, turned his thoughts to an enterprise against Ferrara. But the descent of the Turks and their capture of Otranto in 1480 diverted his attention for a time. As soon, however, as the Turks were driven out the Pope set the old dissensions alight. Ferrara was now his immediate object of attack. The Duke found himself in dire peril. Venice also was rising up against him. His friendship with Naples and Milan was displeasing to the Republic, and there were many points of difference between the two states, on which a dispute could be provoked. Ferrara had always had to be circumspect in her dealings with this arrogant neighbour, who demanded from her almost the deference of a subject. The privileges of the Republic were a lively source of vexation and inconvenience to the Duke. The Ferrarese hated the Venetians. "For their shameful sins," says a chronicler, gloatingly



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in 1478, "Domeneddio Nostro Signore himself is against them, and every day 250 of them die of plague." Yet the Duke, fearful of war, had borne provocations with great forbearance, and to please the Seignory, who claimed the monopoly of salt, he punished his subjects, the poor fishermen of Commacchio, a city that sits like Venice herself in the midst of lagoons, for gathering the salt which the waves laid at their feet. But a rupture was brought about at last by the Venetian Visdomino's abuse of his powers in trying and condemning a priest outside his jurisdiction. He was excommunicated by the Bishop, whereupon he threatened to leave the city. The Duke's patience was exhausted and he answered that the gates were open. The Republic was deeply offended. Sixtus hastened to improve the occasion and despatched his nephew, Count Girolamo Riario, to Venice, and a league was arranged between the Church and the Republic against Milan and Ferrara.

The Ferrarese provinces were now all astir with preparations for defence. Castle and city walls were repaired, towers and bastions built upon the river, the bells of all the campaniles melted down to make cannon-balls. Yet the trouble hung awhile without breaking. Beneath the shadow of it the Carnival of 1482 was celebrated with more brilliance than ever before. Princes, poets and artists were soon, however, to be called to new occupations. Boiardo, relinquishing his poem to take up his sword, ends the second book with the sad words :

"Sentendo Italia di lamenti piena  
Non che ora canto, ma respiro appena."

And now the long sufferings of the city culminated in the agony of war. The Venetians entered the Ferrarese territories by land and water, burning and

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ravaging the villages. Naples, Milan and Florence had leagued with Ercole, but each of them was engaged in making some personal profit out of the situation. The Duke of Calabria with the Neapolitan army was stopped by the Papal forces on his way to Ferrara, and had to content himself with overrunning the territories of the Church; Florence took the opportunity to attack Siena; Lodovico il Moro, now regent of Milan, to overthrow the Rossi of Parma; and the Duke was left almost alone to face the Venetians. Roberto di San Severino, their commander, made a bridge of faggots three miles long across the swamps of the Tartaro and brought all his army over. Strongholds fell before him almost without resistance. The Ferrarese were filled with terror, but the arrival of Duke Federigo of Urbino, commander of the league on their side, comforted them. This grand old soldier, who was not only the flower of all condottieri, but the most nobly cultured prince of his age, was now seventy years old, blind of one eye and lame from a score of wounds. His very presence inspired hope as he passed through on his way to the scene of warfare. But, whether from age or infirmity, he did little. Disaster followed disaster. Adria was taken and cruelly sacked and burned by the Venetians. Com-macchio, to escape the same fate, hastily surrendered, and Ferrara saw the enemy's ships sailing up from the east, while on the north-west, San Severino had advanced close to Massasuperiore and was now approaching Ficarolo, the only defence left between the capital and actual siege. Ficarolo is on the left bank of the Po, fifteen miles above the city; there a beautiful castle of the Dukes had been strongly fortified, and on the opposite bank stood the great stronghold of the Stellata. The Venetian fleet sailed up the main stream of the Po to support San Severino, opposed

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vainly by the bastions which the Ferrarese had built at the Polisella. Ficarolo was closely invested. In vain old Duke Federigo battered the besiegers with his cannon from the Stellata; in vain Ercole led his men out from the city and fell upon the Venetians as they were building a fort on the right bank of the river, slaying many of them. In vain the garrison fought with the utmost spirit. A poor friar, armed with the cross, and followed by a vast procession of the citizens in mourning garb, set out for the enemy's camp to try and soften his heart by prayers and exhortations, but he was turned back by the sceptical Federigo. "The Venetians are not possessed with devils," said the old warrior. "Go and tell Madama," for it was the pious Eleanora that had sent forth this piteous embassy, "that men and money are needed to conquer the enemy."

The defence was overwhelmed at last by the sheer strength of the foe, and after a siege of forty-one days the terrible news was carried into the city that Ficarolo had fallen. The whole territory of Rovigo now quickly fell into the hands of the Venetians, and the Duke of Ferrara was stripped of every sod of earth on the left bank of the main river. Only a few miles of country divided him from ruin. There seemed no help anywhere. His allies sent the scantiest succours. From Florence came a few soldiers unprovided with clothes or arms, and the Bolognese troops did nothing but plunder and misbehave. News came that the Duke of Calabria had suffered a crushing defeat from the Papal army under Roberto Malatesta, and all hope of aid from him was now cut off.

Meanwhile the sufferings of the people were terrible. The Venetians let loose their undisciplined Stradiot mercenaries upon the land, which they ravaged and destroyed, murdering the innocent peasants, soaking







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cradles, says a chronicler, in the blood of infants. The harvests were burnt; grain coming from outside was seized by the enemy's ships. The starving people were exhausted by the building and repairing of defences, and had no strength to till the fields. Everything they possessed melted away into the treasury of the Duke. The seasons, too, seemed charged with a special malignity, and that summer a terrible heat oppressed all Italy, followed by a furious outburst of pestilence. The Ferrarese died like flies. All through this miserable struggle invisible foes dealt far more destruction than the sword to both sides. The enemy suffered badly. Spirit and valour languished, their strong men sickened in the heavy air of these morasses of the Po. The waters were let loose again and again upon them, submerging their camps, drowning them in mud and slime. Commander after commander fell ill and returned to Venice, many to die. On the Ferrarese side Duke Federigo, palsied by the chills of autumn, or oppressed with age and the weariness of a life of warfare, died in the city.

But the languor of her enemy saved Ferrara. Had the Venetians pressed the attack now, the city must have fallen. For it was in parlous case within. Duke Ercole lay ill in his castle, his bright spirit utterly depressed by misfortune. Food was selling at famine prices. Despair was in every heart as the news grew worse and worse. Tidings came that the Ferrarese under Sigismondo d'Este had been defeated at San Biagio, some miles below the city. The prince had escaped on a swift skiff, but a number of nobles had been captured, among them Niccolò da Correggio. They were carried to Venice and there conducted in a kind of Roman triumph round the Piazza of San Marco, after which they were put into prison. Niccolò da Correggio lay in the Torricella for many months,

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sickening in the unwholesome atmosphere of the canals and grieving for his Ferrara. He addressed some verses to his beloved city somewhat weakly beseeching her to yield to her foe: "Thou knowest that the lion can be conquered by humility alone."

At last the Venetians, after long delay, crossed the Po at Francolino, drove the garrison out of the fort of Lagoscuro and spread their camps within the view of the city. They swarmed into the Barco, the great ducal park, which stretched all the way between Ferrara and Francolino. They desecrated its wide green glades, its alleys and orchards and groves, sacred to a prince's pleasure, slaughtered its pretty inhabitants, the deer and pheasants and peacocks, and capturing the rarer beasts, like the Duke's leopards, which he was wont to make race for the entertainment of his guests, packed them off in ships to Venice, that treasure house of stolen goods. Thus was Ercole stripped of those decorative creatures which were the very emblems of a fifteenth-century prince.

The House of Este was indeed under a heavy cloud. Disorder reigned in the city. The streets were crowded with homeless peasants who had fled before the invaders, and who huddled beneath the porticoes of the palaces. "A sight," says a chronicler, "to make the heart break." Worse still was the general discontent. The people distrusted their leaders; they thought they were being deceived, that the Duke was dead. They would not be satisfied till they had been admitted into the Castle and had seen him on his sick-bed. Yet this was not enough to restore their loyalty. They attributed all their miseries to the Duke's chief Ministers, the five Trotti brothers, who held the greatest offices in the State. They had brought the crushing taxes, the war, the famine on the city; they had robbed the widow and

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orphan and driven thousand of families to ruin : and they it was who stood between the people and their lord's clemency. "And this Duke," says the chronicler Caleffini, "was not loved as the others had been because of these men." When the great bell rang, summoning all who could bear arms to help in the defence of the walls, hardly one answered the call, and the people vowed they would sack and burn the city before the Venetians came. The Duchess herself appealed to them from the balcony of the palace, and exhorted them to be faithful to their Lord—but the hated face of Paolo Antonio Trotti was seen beside her, and their answer was to demand his blood. "Give him to us, that we may eat the flesh from his bones." Mindful perhaps of Tommaso da Tortona, a hundred years before, the Duke at last sent the whole Trotti family into exile, to the delirious joy of the city. "Diamante, Diamante, Casa d'Este or death," was now once more the cry.

Meanwhile the Venetians, content to prey on the rich land and sack the beautiful villas of the nobles, delayed their attack. Boiardo, in an eclogue written at this time, throws a pastoral grace over the sorrowful scene, telling, under the figure of two shepherds conversing together, the laments of Tito Strozzi for his ruined palace and golden gardens at Ostellato in the sea marshes. It was now December of this sad 1482. Suddenly deliverance came for Ferrara. The Pope, realising that the prey, once won, would be swallowed altogether by Venice, and that far from securing a duchy for his nephew, as he had intended, he would only lose an important vassal, made peace with his old foes. A new league was formed in which all the powers combined against Venice, and the imperious Pontiff despatched messengers to the Republic bidding it molest Ferrara no more, and



deliver up at once all the territory that had been conquered.

On December 13th the great news was proclaimed from the pulpit of the Duomo by Fra Cherubino da Spoleto, and ten days later, after solemn Mass, a Brief from the Pope himself was read to the people announcing that he had compassion upon them. And the old scholar Carbone, whose garrulous oratory had been hushed by the late trouble, now crept forth once more and answered the Papal ambassador in a Latin discourse, apparently his last. With the first glimpse of better days, poor sick Ferrara began to whisper again in the learned syllables she loved.

But her woes were by no means over. Venice defied the Pope, laughed his ban to scorn, and with indomitable spirit prepared to fight all Italy. Ferrara was still threatened with siege. But friends now flocked to the rescue — Cardinal Gonzaga from the Pope, and the Duke of Calabria with the long delayed Neapolitan army, troops from Florence and Milan — all anxious to strike a blow at Venice. Duke Ercole rose from his sick-bed like a butterfly soaked in a rain storm which spreads its wings to the return of sunshine, and in a "*bellissima festa di ballo*" the old life began again for the Court. Everywhere the Venetian mercenaries were beaten in the languid efforts which they made against the Ferrarese. At last, threatened with invasion itself by the league, the Republic determined on a great attack upon Ferrara. But it was too late. The city had been banked up with earthworks, and towers bristling with cannon rose at short intervals along the walls. The Duke of Calabria had withdrawn all the troops into the city, leaving the Certosa and Sta. Maria degli Angeli outside the walls undefended. But a few independent spirits had hidden themselves in the campanile of the

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church, and when the Venetians were unexpectedly assailed by the arrows and stones of these brave fellows, which actually killed one of their men, and were beginning to be pounded by the guns from the walls, San Severino decided that the enterprise was too difficult and retired rapidly to Lagoscuro, carrying with him as trophies of valour a bronze unicorn stolen from a fountain and a stucco statue of Niccolò III., which had adorned the door of Sta. Maria degli Angeli.

This was the end of all actual danger for the city. But the war dragged fitfully on, in the style of the times. The battles began by one party surprising the other, which ran away. The victors would then triumphantly sack the camp of the vanquished, who, stealing back, would fall upon them and put them to flight in their turn. A good many perished by accidents, such as falling into rivers, in their hasty retreat, but few were killed by the sword. It was not indeed to the interest of the mercenary commanders to risk themselves or their men, and war, like everything else, was an art, pursued by subtlety, in fifteenth-century Italy.

But as time went on, and the Venetians still occupied the country, famine and sickness oppressed Ferrara more than before, and hope died out again. The ruined fields lay untilled. The warfare degenerated into mere cruelty and treachery, as the soldiers grew weary of the long campaign and the chills of the great plain entered their bones. In June the chief scene of the war was transferred to the Adda, where the Milanese and Mantuans had entered the Venetian territories, and the Duke of Calabria for the league and San Severino for the Republic were despatched thither. But the Venetians still held Lagoscuro and all the country round. At last a combined attack

upon their camp at Lagoscuro from different sides was arranged by Ercole and the Duke of Calabria. The Estensi, with a strong force, advanced upon the fortress, but the Duke of Calabria failed to appear, and Ercole ordered his people to retire, which they did in great haste and disorder, imagining that the enemy was upon them. The Venetians in the fortress had meanwhile abandoned it, deceived in the tumult into the belief that their allies had been defeated, and the odd spectacle was seen of both parties fleeing at full speed from one another. The Venetian garrison returned to the fortress as soon as they discovered the truth, and Duke Ercole was bitterly mortified when he found out how he had thrown away victory.

The war died away finally in the sheer weariness of those concerned. Jealousies arose within the league, and Venice, whose subtlety was still more invincible than her courage, did all she could to profit by these signs of dissension. Her ambassadors were secretly working on the allies, and at last a treaty was concluded with Naples, Milan and Florence, without the knowledge of the Pope or the Duke of Ferrara, by which Venice emerged triumphantly out of her embarrassing situation, keeping much of her ill-got gain. Ferrara, which had been wantonly attacked, remained the sufferer. Venice was to keep possession of the city and territory of Rovigo. This famous Peace of Bagnolo is said to have caused the death of Pope Sixtus, whose interests had been entirely disregarded in it, and who was so enraged when the tidings were brought to him that he fell into a fit and died a few hours later.

The loss of Rovigo was a bitter and humiliating blow for the Duke. The country only four miles from his capital would henceforth be in the hands of another Power. But he was too weak to protest.

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As for the people they had passed beyond the point of caring, and it was in complete silence that the peace was proclaimed in the city on the 8th of September 1484.

So ended the great "War of Ferrara." The city recovered with a marvellous rapidity, thanks to that invincible "allegrezza" which has enabled Italy to survive her incredible sufferings in past times. But the war closed an epoch in the city's existence. The Golden Age was gone, never to return. Her story after this is of a splendid Court, of literary glory greater than before, of art and pleasure, scenes and spectacles marvellously beautiful, but no longer of a fortunate people.



EMBLEM OF BORSO D'ESTE, FROM CHURCH OF THE CERTOSA



## CHAPTER VI

### *The City of Ercole*

“Let us build us a city and a tower.”

AS soon as the war was over and the city had roused herself from her stupor of despair and humiliation, the Court resumed its life of manifold amusement and interests. The late troubles had in no way cooled its Renaissance enthusiasms. If the Duke had lost political consequence he was still the sovereign of the most cultured and polite city in Europe, and many victories could not have given Ferrara the distinction that she derives from her influence on the civilisation of the time with its far-reaching effect on modern ages.

To Ercole d'Este the Drama in especial owes much. He did more than any other to restore the Theatre. Mystery plays and religious shows had always been much favoured in Ferrara, but in 1486, by order of the Duke, a comedy, the *Menæchmi*, translated from the Latin of Plautus, was played for the first time. Such plays had already been given in Rome, but Ercole had them represented with a new magnificence and elaboration, and with a scholarly care for correctness in details, classic authors being studiously searched for information upon the scenery and staging of Roman days. The new fashion soon gave rise to original drama, and Boiardo and others wrote plays for the Duke's theatre, and from this time forth no festive occasion passed

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without a dramatic performance. The comedies were broken by interludes of "moreschi" (ballets), which most of the spectators enjoyed more than the classic *pièce de résistance*.

A new spirit, prophetic of the century that was coming, showed itself in a satiric note that began to sound now among the graver voices of philosophers and serious poets. A lean whimsical figure, clad in a threadbare doublet, mingled at this time with the splendid throng at the Court. This was that "spirito bizzarro" Antonio Camelli, called "Il Pistoia" from his native city. He was said to surpass every other in the world in witty sayings. He veiled a fine and poignant satire in his buffoonery, and is the forerunner of Berni and the comic poets of the sixteenth century. He also wrote a tragedy said to be the first in the Italian language. But he was little understood, and the Court only ranked him as the prince of buffoons and jesters. Such gentry were much favoured, for the Duke and his nobles had their frivolous moods, and amused themselves with the most coarse and boisterous sports. Buffoons formed a necessary part of the household of a prince or princess, and stranger creatures still, Moorish pages, dwarfs, human curiosities and monstrosities of every kind, brilliantly bedizened grotesques that flitted among the graver people like curious huge insects, full of laughter, noise and antics. A proof of that age's supreme sense of beauty lies in this appreciation of the artistic value of ugliness, and its triumphant manner of fitting such misshapen beings, to us only a sorrow and repulsion, into a decorative scheme of existence, the harmonies of which it sought to enhance by means of these strange discords.

In the midst of this wonderful Court a young princess was now arising who was to embody in her-

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self its finest culture and all its splendid enjoyment of life. The eldest child of Ercole and Eleanora was that Isabella d'Este who has come down to us as the perfect mirror of Renaissance womanhood, "*la prima donna del mondo*" of her time. Isabella was born in 1474, and surrounded from her earliest years with everything that could develop and refine the sensibilities and faculties of her marvellously active spirit. The treasures of art which filled the palaces of her father trained the incomparable taste which made her later, from her little Court of Mantua, the arbiter of the fashions of Europe and the fastidious critic whose approval was sought by the greatest artists of the day. When she was but a few years old Battista Guarino began to instruct her in the humanities; he testifies to her extraordinary precocity, and in 1480, when she was betrothed to Francesco Gonzaga, eldest son of the Marquis of Mantua, the ambassador sent to arrange the marriage was astounded by the intelligence and quickness of tongue with which the six-year-old princess answered his questions. The scholarship Isabella acquired was enough to be a graceful addition to her womanly attractions, but though she became the most famous lady in Italy for "*il parlar Latino*," she had not a touch of pedantry, and was bored by it in others. Antonio Tebaldeo taught her to write verses, but in this, as in all other arts, she learned to be a fine critic rather than a performer. Her part in life was to be the patroness, to bestow the smile for the sake of which others were to strain their best faculties, to be the lady "*before whom all the Muses bow*." In dancing, music and all graceful accomplishments she soon became so skilled that she roused the wonder and admiration of the whole Court. She grew up a true child of her age and her city, essentially joyous and alert; skimming with the eagerness, the lightness and

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the sure instinct of a bird over the widespread banquet which life offered her. This most perfect flower of la Casa d'Este passed early away from the city where she was born, carrying her graces to her husband's Court of Mantua. Her marriage took place in 1490. The triumphant progress which she made through Ferrara on her departure, riding in a gilded chariot adorned with paintings, was worthy of this maiden deity.

In her new home Isabella created around herself the same atmosphere of art and culture which she had grown up in, and fulfilled the Renaissance ideal of self-development with her strong serene conscience, untroubled by the compunctions so afflicting to weaker and more sensitive generations. She was the friend and correspondent of Castiglione, Bembo, Alberto Pio, and all the great men of the day. Ariosto brought his unfinished poem to read to the "*saggia e pudica, liberale e magnanimo Isabella.*" Aldo Manutio produced his most exquisite editions of the classics to please her fastidious requirements. She had correspondents in all the chief cities who kept her lively interest informed of everything that was going on. Enthusiastic students travelled hither and thither seeking antiquities for her. The great Mantegna was her Court painter and spread his frescoes over her palace chambers; and the Ferrarese painter, Lorenzo Costa, the master and companion of Francia, spent years in her service.

The virtue and excellent sense of this paragon of a lady were tempered by a charming impetuosity and a somewhat jealous disposition. Between her and her younger sister Beatrice there was both affection and rivalry. Beatrice, too, was a famous Renaissance lady, noted for her graces and accomplishments, especially for her dancing. She had been betrothed



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when a few years old to Lodovico il Moro, and very soon after the nuptials of Isabella this beautiful child of fifteen also quitted her father's house to seek her mature bridegroom at Milan. The Duchess of Bari, as she was now become, had, with all her charms, an arrogant and ambitious spirit. She threw herself into her husband's dark and far-reaching schemes, and, partly from youthful vanity, helped to oppress the young Duke Gian Galeazzo and his wife Isabella of Aragon; insulting the unfortunate young Duchess, who was her own cousin, by a great show of splendour and by assuming all the airs of the sovereign's wife. Beatrice had the family love of display and of beautiful things, and the great wealth of Il Moro enabled her to satisfy it to the full. Queen of a Court where the most celebrated men of letters assembled, and with the art of a Leonardo at her command, Beatrice might have equalled her sister in fame had she lived. But she died in childbirth in 1496, when only twenty-one years old, thus escaping the retribution which fell upon her husband later for his manifold sins.

After the marriages of these princesses, a close intimacy and constant intercourse was kept up between the Courts of Ferrara, Mantua and Milan. Urbino was also brought into near connection with the Estensi by the kinship and love between Isabella and her sister-in-law, Elizabetta Gonzaga, wife of Duke Guidobaldo. A common love of art and letters, a hundred intertwined ties of mutual relationship and friendship united these circles. Poets and men of letters passed from one to another. Each Court showed a society of noble manners, fine wit and intelligent interest in high and abstract questions, like that of Urbino to which Castiglione introduces us in his *Cortigiano*, where nobles and great ladies divert themselves by a lofty discussion on the attributes of the ideal courtier.

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Milan was doubly related to Ferrara by the marriage of Alfonso, the Duke's eldest son, with Anna Sforza, sister of the unhappy Duke Gian Galeazzo, and sister-in-law later of the Emperor Maximilian. She too died young in 1496.

The Duke's second son, Don Ferrante, was brought up at the Court of his grandfather, the King of Naples. The third, Ippolito, became an ecclesiastic at a very tender age. When he was six years old he received the tonsure, with solemn ceremony, in the Duomo, and at eight was appointed an Apostolic Pronotary. His father's subservience to the Pope won him many rich benefices, and he was no more than eleven when he was given the Archbishopric of Strigonia. In a grandly appointed litter, attended by nobles and men of letters, this young priest prince of the Renaissance set off for Hungary, there to enjoy the revenues of his See at the Court of his aunt, Bianca of Aragon, wife of King Matthias. Flattered, caressed and indulged from his earliest years, he was to grow up into the splendid, worldly and dissolute young prelate so conspicuous in Ferrara and Rome in later years. In 1493 a cardinal's hat was bestowed on the fourteen-year-old boy, who was the first of his house to enjoy that distinction.

The dowers, equipments and nuptials of his children caused the Duke enormous expense. Nor did his extravagance lessen with age. His hunting dogs alone consumed 370 bushels of wheat in the year. Tournaments, masquerades, sumptuous parties for the chase, went on daily.

To replenish his treasury the Duke had to lay ever heavier burdens upon his State. The exactions of his officers were cruel. The people, unable to pay the imposts, were ruthlessly stripped of their miserable belongings and thrown into prison. Even the jewels

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and valuables of the well-to-do were seized and pawned, and the owners were compelled to redeem them themselves or lose them. After the war the police somewhat relaxed their severity. But the Duke soon showed his displeasure. The income of 6000 crowns and more, which he was wont to draw annually from the fines for blasphemy instituted by Borso, had diminished to a very small sum. Ercole refused to believe in the inconvenient reformation in manners implied by the diminution and rebuked his officers for laxness in imposing the fines. "People were not become more saintly than they had been in the past," he grumbled. The Duke's creditors on their side had such ado to get paid. The artists he employed were constantly sending piteous letters of appeal for the money owed them. Sometimes a debt was paid in coin that was not current, and a common habit was to give a creditor an order upon some hopeless debtor of the Court, and leave them to extract the sum as best he could.

But the Government, though cruel and oppressive, was weak. Crime was rampant, and the country swarmed with brigands. Justice was in the hands of careless and incapable persons—often of poets whose gentle souls were turned wholly to the Muse. Boiardo was made Governor of Reggio, where he was quite unable to cope with the disorder that prevailed. A chronicler narrates that he was a man much to be reprehended for his mildness, and more fit for composing songs than for punishing crimes; that his authority was contemned, and that under his government murderers and robbers extorted money with impunity from whomsoever they would. False coiners carried on their trade in his province, and the Governor was accused by the Venetians of conniving at their practices, and though apparently quite innocent

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he lost the Duke's grace to some extent and his later years were clouded with trouble. Il Pistoia, the satirist, who was made captain of one of the gates of Reggio in answer to his importunities, could only remember to make sonnets and allowed thieves to foregather in peace under the walls. Tito Strozzi occupied the great office of Judge of the Savi for many years, and either from carelessness or greed made himself bitterly hated—"Mangia populi" (Devourer of the People), he was called. The Ministers had to be the scapegoats for the sins of their master, but they deserved much of the abuse lavished upon them. Niccolo Ariosto, the poet's father, who also was Judge of the Savi for a time, was more unpopular almost than any, and the most merciless satires were circulated against him. But the worst and most terrible oppressor of all was one Gregorio Zampante da Lucca, the head of the police (Capitano di Justizia), who was all-powerful with the Duke. The Ferrarese diarist waxes hot with indignation as he narrates the numberless iniquities of this "Great Rogue, King of Thieves"; his injustice, cruelty and extortions. So hateful was he to all, that he dared not go forth without a strong escort of archers, nor eat anything but pigeons bred and cooked in his own house. He met his doom in spite of all precautions. One July day, as he was resting in the heat of the afternoon, three students penetrated into his palace, and while one stood on guard at the door and another on the stair, the third burst into his chamber and stabbed him to death upon his bed. Not a soul laid hands upon the avengers as they rushed from the house, leapt upon their horses, and shouting, "Come forth, we have killed Zampante," rode furiously through the streets and away out of the gate into safety. The people crowded to the dead man's house, and would have sacked it had they not been dispersed, and



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a perfect Alleluia burst forth over his corpse in the form of songs and sonnets of satirical triumph.

The Duke, like another Gallio, cared for none of these things. He desired nothing else "except every day to adorn and beautify this his city of Ferrara with new edifices and palaces." The love of building natural to the Italians was in Ercole a passion that amounted to genius. The Duke's forefathers had all been builders; yet even Borso, the most lavish of all, had contented himself with raising a score or so of sumptuous palaces and villas. But this man must needs build a whole city. With the help of the Ferrarese architect, Biagio Rossetti, he conceived and carried out an addition to Ferrara larger than the whole of the existing city. The old northern boundary ran where the Viale Cavour and the Giovecca run now, passing close under Castel Vecchio. Here stood the ancient Porta de' Leoni beside the Torre de' Leoni. A great space was now marked out beyond the walls, taking in the old Borgo de' Leoni and a number of scattered habitations, amongst them the great monastery of the Certosa, Sta. Maria degli Angeli, and the Palace of Belfiore—and in 1490 the work of enclosing it in walls was begun. The Duke had some excuse for extending the city. The Ferrarese diarist tell us that in 1491, by reason of the people being so much multiplied, no houses could be found either to buy or to hire. This was partly due to a great influx of Jews, expelled from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella. But Ercole's motive was no modern anxiety to relieve overcrowding and provide house-room for base mechanics. No consideration of utility marred the perfect plan of his city, which he laid out as we see it now with classic symmetry, in clear, fair spacious order, the wide streets racing out arrow-like as their maker's spirit, north, east and west, towards the unknown. On



VIA DEGLI ANGELI



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either side of them rose noble palaces, upon which the best work of sculptors and painters was employed. The *Addizione Erculea*, as it is called, caused Burckhardt to apply to Ferrara the epithet of "the first modern city of Europe." The wide, regular streets must indeed have been a new and marvellous spectacle to fifteenth-century Italians, accustomed to narrow, heavy-browed alleys, but the city of Duke Ercole has little else in common with the monotonous ranges of characterless buildings which we call towns. It was in truth the shrine of a society that has passed utterly away; the ideal habitation for the perfect prince and perfect courtier of the Renaissance. As we see these beautiful palaces now, the stately marble portals, the long arcades and spacious grass-grown courts, still, in their sad decay and abandonment, touched by an incomparable grace, they appear like the empty shell of a forgotten state of existence.

The Duke filled his city with new churches and palatial convents. One of the most vivid traits in Ercole's character was his piety; Savonarola himself testifies that he was of devout and holy life more than any lord in Italy. He was zealous in all religious observances, attended Mass every day, and kept all the feasts of the Church with great pomp. Every holy Thursday he received a company of poor old men, in number equal to the united ages of himself and his Duchess, and washed their feet with the utmost humility, and afterwards feasted them, serving them with his own hands. His chapel was his special care, and he collected a choir of famous singers from all parts. He ordered the most expensive religious spectacles in the Duomo during Lent, and took infinite pains to attract celebrated preachers for the Lent sermons. Endless were the pilgrimages which he performed. By their constant alms he and his wife converted the innumer-



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able religious communities of the city into privileged beggars.

It is difficult to credit the sincerity of a faith which had so little influence upon conduct. Yet there can be little doubt that the religious feeling of this prince, who had not scrupled to attempt to murder his nephew and had beheaded him later without mercy, was quite genuine. The Italians, steeped in the revived spirit of antiquity, seem to have returned to the old natural worship of their land, and, under the names of the Christian God and the Christian heroes, to have bowed themselves before those more ancient divinities, who not only deified man's virtues, but his vices and weaknesses also, and who themselves stood with him on this side of the veil of the unknown. Yet the modern curiosity could not rest content with the old agnosticism; a sense of what was behind, of dimly-apprehended wonders, provoking doubts and questionings, was strong in this generation, to whom new worlds on earth were opening out. They strove with the help of astrologers and necromancers to peer through the veil. Belief in the influence of the stars and in all sorts of magic prevailed at Ferrara as elsewhere. Some of the chief scholars at the Court were noted astrologers. It is not surprising that superstition mingled largely with Duke Ercole's piety. Several times in his life he was much discomposed by the report that groans had been heard proceeding from the tomb of the Beata Beatrice d'Este in Sant' Antonio, whose bones were supposed in this manner to admonish her house of coming misfortune. He carried his reverence for saints to absurdity. It was his great desire to adorn his new city with one, but persons of renowned sanctity were not very common. Viterbo, however, possessed one in Lucia di Narni, a very holy nun who, like Sta. Caterina of Siena, bore the stigmata. By much

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persuasion and promises to build a beautiful convent for her, the Duke induced this lady to consent to transfer herself to his capital. But Viterbo, proud of her sanctity, was determined to keep her, and she had to be carried out of the city by stealth in a basket and brought under strong protection to Ferrara, where Ercole established her in a splendid new convent. Another holy virgin, Suor Columba, who lived on food ministered to her by the angels, also graced the city.

The Duke's religious zeal appears in a nobler light during the period that he leant his ear to the message of Savonarola. In 1495, when the great Dominican was dominating the Florence over which Lorenzo de' Medici had but a few years before held sway, Ercole entered into a correspondence with him in which the Duke's many-sided and impressionable spirit is revealed in a very attractive light. He earnestly begs the prayers of the holy father for himself and his people, Savonarola's own compatriots, thanks him for his good counsel, and professes his intention to carry out certain reforms proposed to him by the Dominican. He did in fact issue proclamations and new regulations with the object of purging the city of the dreadful vices that prevailed and reforming it to the Christian life. In 1497 he wrote to the Frate, assuring him that he still believed in his prophecies that salvation was coming to Italy, though the coming was tardy. The Duke's interest in Savonarola was well known to the latter's friends, and when, on the Frate being arraigned for heresy, Gio Francesco Pico della Mirandola wrote a defence of him, he dedicated it to the Duke of Ferrara. But political considerations outweighed Ercole's private feelings. He excused himself vehemently to the Pope, denying any knowledge of the apology and vowing that he would have the dedication immediately revoked. And Girolamo

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Savonarola went to the stake without a single voice from his native city being uplifted on his behalf.

But the Duke of Ferrara betrayed a worse and more fatal weakness in the support which he gave to Lodovico il Moro in his evil policy of instigating the descent of Charles VIII. into Italy. The story of the French invasion, with which the bright Quattrocento ended and the splendid civilisation of the Italian Renaissance entered on its decay, is a pitiable and degrading page of Italian history. Though the sin of opening the door to the foreigners is Lodovico Sforza's, the shame of it lies with all Italy, who let them come. It was the crowning act of that folly of jealousy, dissension and greed which had always divided the Italian nation. Venice, hating Naples, welcomed the invader. Florence, longing for deliverance from her tyrants the Medici, saw no help except from over the Alps. Her prophet and guide Savonarola himself looked, like Dante, outside Italy for his country's salvation. The Pope, traditional head of the national party, coquetted first with one side and then with the other, ready to ally with whichever would help him to despoil the vassals of the Church and bestow their states upon his bastards. Ferrara was in a peculiar position. Her geographical position exposed her to such attacks as she had already suffered from Venice and the Church, her two constant dangers. At the same time the riches, renown and diplomatic talent of her reigning house made her alliance of importance to greater Powers. Ercole, true to the family policy of neutrality, had, especially since the war of 1482, done his utmost to keep well with everybody. To Venice he avowed continually his desire to be the "buon figliolo" of the Republic. Lodovico il Moro was his son-in-law, and to Naples, foe both of Venice and Milan, he was

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united by his wife Eleanora of Aragon. But to maintain friendship with all at this juncture was impossible. In France the Duke saw a power to whom his alliance would be useful, who could have no interest in overthrowing him and whose friendship would be a bulwark for him, against nearer enemies. He favoured Lodovico's project from its birth. In 1493 he entered into a league formed by Milan, Venice and the Pope against Naples and favourable to France. His adoption of a policy which aimed at the ruin of her father's house must have wrung the heart of Eleanora of Aragon. The death of this gracious princess a few months later throws a tragic shade over the Duke's new policy.

Charles VIII.'s expedition and his conquest of Naples in 1495, the league formed against him, as soon as he passed, by his first allies, Milan and Venice, his ignominious retreat and the battle of the Taro by which he succeeded in escaping his enemies, are familiar matters. Though Duke Ercole took no part in these wars beyond despatching his eldest son Don Alfonso to take service with the Venetians, and his second, Ferrante, to follow the standard of the French King, and allowing the troops from the north passage through his dominions, the shadow of the general misfortune fell upon Ferrara too. The mere passage of the foreign soldiers was a curse as terrible as war. They ravaged the land, plundered, robbed, and committed every brutality upon the peasants. Every thinking soul must have been filled with foreboding as to the future. In this moment of gloom and sorrow the voice of Ferrara's sweetest Quattrocento poet died away in a cry of lamentation. Boiardo, still Governor of Reggio, was utterly overcome by the heavy care of providing for the passage of the French through his province and by his anguish at the spectacle



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of their cruelty. His great poem breaks off abruptly, never to be resumed :

“ Mentre che io canto, o Dio Redentore  
Vedo l'Italia tutta a fiamma e foco  
Per questi Galli, che con gran valore  
Vengon, per disertar non so che loco.”

With this rare spirit, something of the naïve joyousness of the age seems to vanish. Boiardo and his like had lived in a beautiful dream where love and courtesy reigned, at least in appearance, and vice was partly redeemed by enthusiasm and illusions. But the new generation was beginning to be dominated by a different sentiment and a sadder insight. The splendid show could no longer command its full faith, and to the contemporaries of Ariosto princes would be no longer gods. Beauty and the joy of life would fail to satisfy souls which had lost the wings of youth. Ariosto was to take up the work of Boiardo and continue it with an incomparable grace and sweetness and a skill far surpassing the older poet, but a note of disillusionment, a hint of cynicism, would sound in its gentle humorous satire, such as the single-minded Boiardo never knew.

As the old century was setting, Ariosto was arriving at manhood. Though he had been born in Reggio, where his father was Governor at the time, and of a Reggian lady, Daria de' Malaguzzi, he had lived since eleven years old in the paternal city, and his temperament, as well as his passionate love for Ferrara, marks him a Ferrarese of the Ferrarese. He tells the story of his youth himself in a satire addressed in later life to his friend, Pietro Bembo. Like so many great men, the bent of his genius was thwarted at first by his father, who drove him with spits and darts, as he says, to turn over glosses and texts when he was most inclined

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towards the apple of Pegasus. Five years he spent in such triflings (*ciancie*). But when his father found that the time was all thrown away, after much opposition, he gave him his liberty, and at twenty years old the youth began to study letters at the University under Gregorio da Spoleto, who :

“Tenea d’ambe le lingue i bei secreti.”

His tutor was, however, soon taken from him by the “sfortunata Duchessa,” Isabella of Aragon, widow of Duke Gian Galeazzo, who summoned Gregorio to be her son’s tutor. But Ariosto continued to study “i miei Latini,” chanting his light loves in Latin verses full of a new vivacity, and consuming his delicious youth in the company of kindred spirits, such as Alberto Pio, Ercole Strozzi, the poet Tito’s poet son, and Pietro Bembo, who was studying at Ferrara at this time.

It is strange to note the placidity of the young man’s Muse, which dallies in gentle pastoral scenes of perfect peace while his country was “all in fire and flames.” But older voices were here and there uplifted to bewail the country’s woes. Tebaldeo cries scorn upon the “italico paese” that has allowed the invader to trample over her, and Il Pistoia’s satire is full of tears as he derides Italy and her sons for having become “galline.”

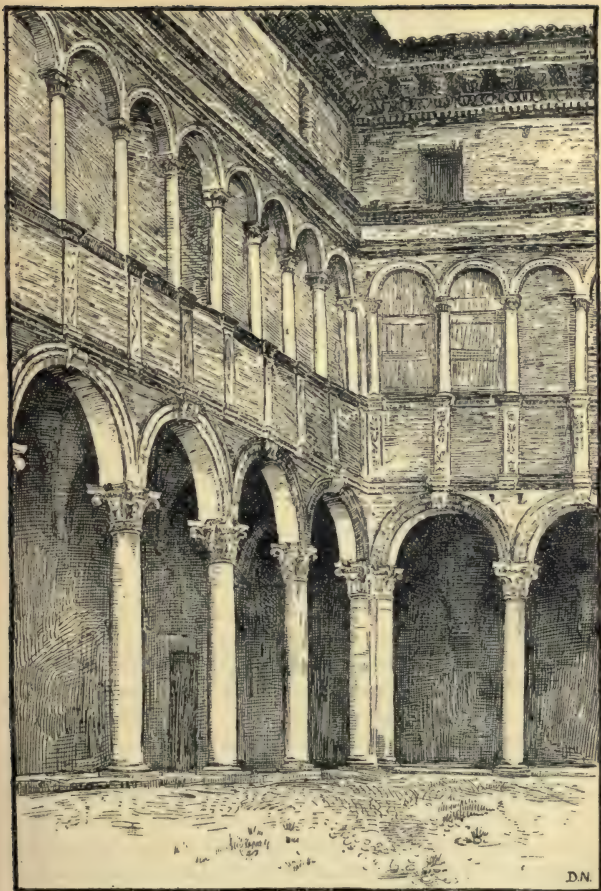
But trouble soon came to the young Ariosto. His father, Niccolò, died in 1500. He left a family of eleven to share a small patrimony, and Lodovico, being the eldest, had now, as he says, to turn his thoughts from Mary to Martha and to exchange Homer for account books. On him fell the care of the family; the duty of finding husbands and providing portions for sisters; arranging the education of

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his brothers and settling them in professions, without too much shrinking the common heritage. Soon after, his cousin, Pandolfo, "il mio parente, amico, fratello anzi," died. Pandolfo was one of the most happily endowed of the gifted Ariosto race, which had long given men of great talents and accomplishments to Ferrara. The mind of the young poet, bereft of this best friend and comrade, now found itself so loaded with sorrows that he longed that Fate would break her spindle at his thread of life :

"Ma si truovò di tanti affanni carca  
Allor la mente mia, ch' ebbi desire  
Che la cocca al mio fil fesse la parca."

The new century, which found Ferrara's finest spirit thus trammelled with care, opened sorrowfully for the whole of Italy. Charles VIII. had been but the herald of a host of invaders, who now, repeating the story of long ago, were to fall in horde after horde upon the country, and set up a new domination of the foreigner, which should last almost to our own day. In 1499 Charles's successor, Louis XII., prepared a new Italian expedition. This time Milan was its object, and Lodovico il Moro was overthrown for good in 1500. A spirit as ambitious and still more coldly unscrupulous than his had now appeared on the troubled scene of Italian politics in Cesar Borgia, who, supported by his father, the Pope, and allied with the French, was carving a kingdom for himself out of the States of the Church. The country was overrun by the French soldiery. Though the Ferrarese territory suffered bitterly from them, the Duke dared not quarrel with his great ally. His dependence on France and his fears of the Borgia brought about a bitter humiliation to the pride of his House. In 1501 Alexander VI. proposed a marriage between his



PALAZZO IL MORO.





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daughter Lucrezia and the Duke's eldest son, the widower Don Alfonso. The idea was received almost with derision. That this famous sovereign house, the proudest and most ancient in Italy, save that of Savoy, should receive the daughter of an upstart race, the bastard of a Pope, and exalt the Borgian Bull beside the Silver Bird which the Lilies of France and the Eagle of the Empire guarded on either side, would be ignominy enough. But the name of the lady was, besides, so grievously besmirched by common report as to rouse horror even in that easy age. Though but twenty-one, she had been several times affianced and twice married, and all these alliances had been dissolved as soon as they were no longer useful to her father and brother. Vulgar opinion, suggested by the enemies of the Borgias, and helped by the mystery which enveloped this wicked and fortunate family, credited the Pope and his son with other than political motives in these acts, and put a hideous interpretation upon their affection for Lucrezia. No wonder the Estensi were revolted at the thought of the son of Eleanor of Aragon taking such a woman to wife. But they soon found that they were caught in a subtle web. The Pope was resolved on the marriage. Louis XII., who at this moment was making ready a new invasion of Naples and needed the Pope's help, readily used his influence in favour of the project. The struggles of the proud Estensi were in vain. Pressed by the French King, and threatened with war by the Pope and his all-conquering son if he refused, Ercole was forced to consent to the marriage, but he could only overcome the repugnance of Alfonso by vowing to marry the lady himself if his son would not. The Duke consoled himself as best he could by exacting the highest terms from Alexander, who was so delighted that there was nothing he was not ready to

do for the House of Este. But Ercole's demands were so extravagant that the Pope lost patience and declared that he haggled like a shopkeeper. A dowry of 200,000 ducats, the diminution of the annual tribute of Ferrara to the Church from 4000 ducats to 100 florins, the settlement of the duchy upon Alfonso and his heirs, the possession of certain territories belonging to the Church, and other great advantages, were insisted upon and granted. The affair was regarded on both sides as a mere bargain, and the happiness of his daughter, which Alexander was deeply concerned about, had to be left to chance.

The Duke, however, showed great kindness towards Lucrezia. The woman whom la Casa d'Este chose to honour was to be treated as the most royal of princesses. He ordained that the nuptials should be more magnificent than any ever witnessed. In all matters of taste and show Ercole d'Este was supreme, and Ferrara yielded him abundant means for triumph of that kind. A choir of rare poets was ready to laud the bride. Lodovico Ariosto composed an epithalamium in which he calls her "*virgo pulcherrima*" and likens her to the Roman Lucrezia, the pattern of chastity. The Strozzi, father and son, did not spare their elaborately polished flatteries. Celio Calcagnini, a young Ferrarese scholar famous later on, evoked Venus and the Muses to give her praise. All decorated her with the virtues which she should have had.

Meanwhile a noble posse of princes and courtiers, led by Don Ferrante and the young Cardinal Ippolito, had set off in December to fetch the bride. Their reception was one of the most pompous spectacles ever seen in the Eternal City. The marriage ceremony took place in the Vatican, and Don Ferrante placed the ring on the bride's finger and wedded her in the name of his brother. The splendid young cardinal

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then presented her with the Duke's gift, a set of priceless jewels, and performed his part with exquisite grace, carrying out with fine diplomacy his cautious father's instructions that it should be presented in such a way that it could be reclaimed should the Pope play false at the last moment. Christmas being past and the New Year come, in the midst of every festivity Lucrezia bade farewell to her father and the old wicked city where she had passed her strange youth and set forth with the Ferrarese princes for her new home.

And what manner of woman was this undesired bride whom the slow streams were now carrying down to Ferrara? Her unwilling husband, Don Alfonso, was to meet her in state at a little distance from the city, but the night before he rode out disguised to Castel Bentivoglio, where she was resting on her way, and passed two hours with her. He complained no more of his lot, his prejudice conquered by a glance. The personality of Lucrezia Borgia is one of the fascinating enigmas of history. She had grown up in a society where moral principle did not exist, the openly avowed daughter of a Pope, beside whose throne in St. Peter's she had sat at the most sacred ceremonies. She had seen her father and brother grow powerful by murder and shameless intrigue, had been nursed in luxury purchased by the open sale of sacred offices and honours, and had assisted, it was said, at the orgies of Roman courtesans in the palace of the Pope. The helpless sport of the dark family schemes, she had been tossed from one husband to another, had had one torn from her arms and slain by her brother, and had grown used to hearing herself derided as the most abominable of women. Yet out of this environment of corruption, tragedy and shame she had emerged, it would seem, innocent, unspotted



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and joyous still, like a bird that rides upon a thousand crested sea, unconscious of danger, keeping its plumage unhurt. And now, after riding out the storms of her early life, she had found shelter at last. Once within the palace of Alfonso no malice comes near her fair repute. The princes of Este knew how to guard the honour of their wives, and even if Lucrezia had been as lightly inclined as was supposed, the memory of Parisina must have given her pause. But her spotless conduct and noble bearing as Duchess of Ferrara redeem the unmerited disgrace which the evil environment of her youth had put upon her.

Cagnolo, the French ambassador's secretary, present at the marriage, has left a charming description of Lucrezia: "The bride is of middle stature, of delicate aspect, and has a somewhat long face, a nose well formed, golden hair, light<sup>1</sup> eyes, and a rather large mouth with very white teeth, a white and slender throat sufficiently round, and is continually joyous and smiling." Clad in a vesture of sable velvet, with an ermine-trimmed mantle of gold brocade, her hair flowing free from beneath the fine veil glittering with diamonds and gold which covered her head, she made her entry into Ferrara on the 2nd of February riding on a milk-white horse caparisoned in crimson, beneath a purple baldachin which four scarlet-gowned doctors of the University upheld. She was preceded by a long array of archers, trumpeters and musicians; by all the nobles of Ferrara and many from Mantua and Urbino; by the bridegroom robed in crimson velvet and by an immense train of pages and courtiers; by bishops and by ambassadors of foreign states in reverend gala dress of brocade and velvet. Immediately before her went six musicians with drums and her two favourite buffoons. Duke Ercole followed, a majestic

<sup>1</sup> "Occhi bianchi," meaning light blue or grey eyes.

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figure robed in sable velvet, upon a horse caparisoned in the same rich and sombre stuff. The Duchess of Urbino who rode beside him had likewise chosen a dress of black velvet, which set off the fairness of her skin. The Princes of Este followed conducting Lucrezia's ladies, among them a fair kinswoman of the bride's, Madonna Angela Borgia, whom a Ferrarese chronicler describes as a "*damigella elegantissima*." Fourteen chariots of state came next, filled with noble Ferrarese ladies in dazzling attire, and the great procession wound up with an endless stream of mules bearing the wedding chests and coffers of the bride in pompous display. The gorgeously-decorated streets were packed with shouting spectators; thousands of instruments filled the air with noise; guns thundered salutes. At the very moment of entering the gate beside Castel Tedaldo, the bride's horse, terrified by the clamour, reared and threw her. "*E lei ridendo smontò,*" says Cagnolo. She who was used to being displaced and had found her feet in a score of predicaments, slipped off smiling, and allowed herself to be reseated upon another horse, and the procession moved on once more. No wonder a creature so undismayed won the hearts of the people as she had won her lord's. They received her with enthusiastic joy, reading in her sunny aspect the promise of protection and kindness. The whole way was strewn with flowers and branches, and canopied over with brilliant tissues flung from roof to roof; triumphant arches, decked in the graceful inventions of the Court painters, spanned it. Ariosto, who was present on that day, must have recalled this scene in his Ferrara when he painted the nuptial feast of Bradimante and Ruggiero. At every corner stages were set up, where pagan deities, virtues, classic characters, and a medley of monsters and fantastic beings, were represented by living figures, in dance or

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frolic or emblematic array. On one appeared a queen mounted upon a bull (the Borgia device) and surrounded by nymphs and satyrs. As Lucrezia passed through the Piazza, two mountebanks shot down upon invisible ropes from two high towers and fell simultaneously at her feet. She moved slowly on amid the excited throng, and entered under the great archway of the Palace, between the statues of Niccolò III. and Borso, and dismounted at the foot of the marble stairway, which still exists. Here she was met by the Marchioness of Mantua, by the Duke's natural daughter, Lucrezia, wife of Annibale Bentivoglio, and by a brilliant crowd of young princesses, mostly illegitimate children of his brothers. Sumptuous festivities now began and continued for six days. Jousts and combats of single champions in the Piazza; banquets and balls every day in the great Sala of the Palace, at which all the most beautiful women of Ferrara danced for the delight of the prince and his guests, and the bride sat in state upon a throne, anon stepping down to show her grace and skill in some Spanish or Roman step to the sound of tambourines; solemn presentations of gifts by the ambassadors, among whom the somewhat bourgeois manners of the Venetian envoys, who took off the rich robes of velvet and fur from their own shoulders and laid them at Lucrezia's feet, caused much amusement to this aristocratic Court. One day, while the bride rested a little, the Duke conducted the French ambassador and his other guests to see the wonders of his city, his great park, his palaces and churches, not forgetting to present them to his holy nun, the Lucia di Narni, in her splendid new convent of Sta. Caterina. Every night after the ball the company was led into a great theatre arranged in the Palazzo della Ragione and one of the comedies of Plautus was performed, interspersed with wonderful "*moresche*,"

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in which mythological and allegorical conceits were represented, and fantastic monsters, satyrs, nymphs, gladiators and rustics danced and frolicked to the



GREAT STAIRCASE OF DUCAL CORTILE

music of lutes and violins, with a great deal of coarse burlesque and buffoonery. These ballets, which call to mind the fantastic imaginings of Ariosto, and the scenes which we see upon the canvases of the Cinque cento painters were an especial distinction of these



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entertainments, of Duke Ercole's. To us, that Renaissance audience, could we see it, would be a vision more enchanting than the play. Gregorovius likens the scene to the *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the marriage feast of the Duke of Athens. The unflagging spirit of enjoyment which enabled the company to sit out the five or six hours of the performances is perhaps the most astounding thing of all. Isabella found them very dull, as she tells her husband in one of those letters of hers which have preserved the details of these famous nuptials; her critical taste quarrelled with the music, and the too great licence of some of the shows offended her. The whole wedding was, according to her, a very melancholy affair. Though her father's child, Isabella belonged to the new century and was capable of being bored. Her discontent with the alliance no doubt influenced her opinion, and probably a touch of jealousy. She was six years older than Lucrezia, and had reason to be anxious about the supremacy of her charms beside those of the golden-haired and splendidly equipped bride. The two princesses were from the time of Lucrezia's marriage in some sort rivals. Lucrezia was a new queen in the closely united worlds of Ferrara and Mantua, where Isabella had before reigned supreme. She was not so brilliantly accomplished as the Marchioness of Mantua, but she was well cultivated, and her wit, if not so vivacious, allured perhaps more strongly by a gentle and mysterious sympathy. Isabella was to see rare spirits, whose homage she prized, such as Ercole Strozzi, Tebaldeo and Bembo, drawn irresistibly towards this woman whom she secretly scorned and disliked. The different way in which they affected their contemporaries is reproduced in the different impression which the relics left of each make upon us now. The lively and abundant correspondence upon all

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things with all men which remains of Isabella fills us with admiration and wonder, but it does not touch us like the few simple letters of Lucrezia to her poet adorer Bembo, which lie with a lock of golden hair in the Ambrogiana Library at Milan.

This marriage feast was the last great occasion of Duke Ercole's life. He died in 1505. With this prince perished the fervent temper which had made the fifteenth century great in Ferrara. The faith of man in himself, in his power and right to do and be that which he would, lacked in the new generation. With war and the sober realities of life, that had soon to be faced, a new consciousness of sorrow and helplessness was to come, while pleasure would grow fiercer and more unbridled, destroying the fine balance of the Renaissance spirit. The soul that had tried to free itself was to fall back into bondage as the country became once more the slave of the foreigner. This princely builder had created a fair fabric of existence, but like the city, which was its outward symbol, it was never completed. The *Addizione Erculea* remained as he left it, and its half-built edifices, such as the vast new Church of Sta. Maria degli Angeli, crumbled away within a short space. The decay of the long centuries has settled upon his work: The most melancholy spot in it is the great Piazza Nuova at its very centre, which was to have been the finest place in all Ferrara. Beside the one or two noble palaces that were built there, and which stand now neglected and converted to sordid use, the mean houses of the poor have crept in, and squalid children tumble about the coarse, untended grass around the column which rises in the midst and reminds us in a curious way of Duke Ercole. For here the creator of the new city intended to lift a lofty monument to himself. But misfortune overtook the scheme. He commanded two splendid

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marble columns to be sent to Ferrara, but as they were being landed one fell into the river and was never recovered. Though a base, adorned with bas-reliefs and inscriptions, was erected for the other, it was not set up till much later and the equestrian statue of the Duke which should have stood upon it, overtopping the city, was never carved. Death had ended his power and desire for self - glorification and his successors did not care to immortalise him.

There is something in the soaring spirit of this prince which reminds us of the aspiring charioteer upon whose foundered hopes Ferrara is said to have arisen. The whole of that bright Renaissance society indeed seems figured in the old mythical tale of a swift proud course, a brief glory and sudden darkness ; in that allegory of human aspiration eternally checked, as the day is checked by the eternal recurrence of night.

But a statue stands on the column to-day, though not Duke Ercole's. Ferrara has set thereon the image of the true prince of her Renaissance, Lodovico Ariosto. Ercole might well be content to make way for the man whose perfect art is the fulfilment of that splendid Ferrarese culture which to have fostered is his own enduring honour ; for him who was the chief fountain of the great stream of song which flowed out of this city and carried its glory to future ages.

“Onde stagione fu di gloria e corse  
con il tuo fiume, o fetontea Ferrara,  
ampio, seren, perpetuo, sonante  
l'italo canto.”

## CHAPTER VII

### *Shocks and Alarms*

“ Oh fameliche, inique e fiere Arpie  
ch' all' accecata Italia, e d'etror piena,  
per punir forse antique colpe rie,  
in ogni mensa alto giudicio mend !”

*Orl. Fur.*, Canto XXXIV.

THE new Duke of Ferrara, Alfonso I., who had been summoned to his father's death-bed from England, where he was studying the industries and manufactures of the country in the course of a tour through the principal countries of Europe, was essentially positive and practical in mind. Poetry and letters interested him little, but he had much appreciation and understanding of the arts. He was himself an accomplished performer on the violin, and his encouragement of the manufacture of majolica and his personal skill in making beautiful pots and platters makes his name memorable in the history of ceramics. The Ferrarese pottery became famous in his reign.

But his chief passion was for mechanics. He interested himself especially in the founding of cannon, not only summoning the best workmen for the purpose, but labouring with his own hands. The Duke of Ferrara's guns were soon to win renown throughout Europe and decide the fate of battles, with far-reaching consequences. Alfonso d'Este was indeed excellently equipped both in disposition and character



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for the stormy course which was before him, but as yet circumstances had not called out his strong qualities, and his neglect of appearances roused much contempt for him in that ornamental Court. He cared nothing for show or state, but passed all his time with his artisans, and in his leisure moments amused himself in rude sports with them and other companions of base degree.

But if Alfonso lacked exterior dignity, his brother the Cardinal kept up all the traditional splendour of the House. Ippolito, who drew great wealth from his numerous sees and benefices, was one of the most brilliant and corrupt princes of the Church in that age when the Sacred College, like the throne of Peter itself, had become the seat of worldly ambition and vicious manners. He was a priest merely in form. The vocation of a warrior was more suited to him, and he was constantly seen in armour and mounted upon a war-horse. He surrounded himself like a fashionable prince with men of letters and science, and took a genuine interest in mathematics and astronomy, but he had little real culture. He scorned poetry, and expected the singers in his train to repay his patronage with more practical service than verse-making. Over Alfonso he exercised much influence, and played a large part in State affairs. Don Ferrante, though older than Ippolito, was less regarded by the Duke, and Sigismondo, the youngest child of Ercole and Eleanora, was an invalid, and lived a retired life. A natural son of the last Duke, Giulio, one of the beautiful love-children of the Renaissance, and destined to a tragic fate, was a prominent figure at Court.

These princes, though they professed themselves patrons of letters, had not the sympathy of their father for the poets of the Court. These found their in-

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spiration instead in the Duchess. This woman with the singular past had made for herself a sure place in Ferrara. Her capacity and excellent sense had gained her the confidence of her father-in-law and husband, and neither hesitated to commit the government to her in their absence. The death of her father, Alexander VI., a year after her marriage, and the collapse of Cesar Borgia's power, had robbed the Estensi of all political advantage from the alliance. But this made no difference in their conduct towards Lucrezia, whose personal qualities were able to command their affection and respect. And in return she had borne herself ever since her marriage to Alfonso with dignity and discretion. While her husband was withdrawn in his mysterious workshops, labouring like a Vulcan at the smithy, this Venus wandered in the delicious gardens of the Castle, with a train of poet worshippers, who celebrated the roses plucked by her fingers, or compared her beautiful eyes to the sun which dazzles him who dares to gaze at it, and lavished in her praise a thousand pagan conceits and delicate inventions. But she returned their adoration with no more than a gentle platonic kindness. Antonio Tebaldo and Ercole Strozzi were the foremost in doing her homage, and Ariosto, in the forty-second canto of his *Orlando*, makes these two, "un Lino ed uno Orfeo," the supporters of her statue upon the fountain of famous women.

Their rapturous praises of the fair Duchess were, no doubt, often but courtly flattery. But one of her worshippers was deeply in earnest. The romantic passion of Pietro Bembo for her is well known. The Venetian poet saw her first soon after her marriage, when he came to be the guest of the Strozzi at their villa in the sea marshes at Ostellato. He was immediately enthralled. At the Court, which

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he constantly visited, he soon became one of her intimate circle, and sometimes she would deign to descend the river with her ladies and break in upon his studies at Ostellato. The freedom which characterised the intercourse of ladies and cavaliers in that day, and which was the fine homage paid by the men of the Renaissance to its nobly cultured women, reigned between this poet and princess. Letters passed continually from one to the other, and he would send her sonnets in praise of her beauties of mind and of person, and she sweet-sounding Spanish lyrics to him, sometimes of her own composition. Lucrezia seems to have been moved for once out of her calm by the exquisite devotion of this refined spirit, whom Castiglione chooses as the exponent of ideal love in his *Cortigiano*. Bembo was, moreover, a beautiful and graceful cavalier, a contrast to her rude, mechanic lord. Some of the letters between them suggest that his love was returned. Bembo's feeling for her was an open secret to his friends, to whose critical eyes he would submit the amorous verses which he indited to the lady. It could not have escaped the Duke, but Alfonso, disdainful of the refinements of so reverent a passion, did not apparently interfere, though there are indications in the letters that at one time she was being watched, and that caution was necessary in her intercourse with the poet. After about a year Bembo left Ferrara, called away by family trouble—and perhaps, also, forbidden her presence any more. His letters, complaining of Fortune which had taken from him everything dear and sweet that she could, are full of sadness, for which the death of his brother, which had just happened, was probably not the sole cause. He sent the Duchess his *Asolani*, and in an accompanying letter depicts her, with an exile's envy, amidst her circle of ladies and poets, listening to the reading of

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his "ragionamenti" upon love. He revisited Ferrara but rarely afterwards, though often speaking of "quella dolce patria" with longing regret. What Lucrezia felt at his departure we cannot tell, nor what secret griefs and sins she wept at those frequent times when she retired from the Court to pray and meditate in the mystic quiet of the Convent of Corpus Domini.

Ariosto, who had entered the service of Cardinal Ippolito and was numbered among the Court poets, celebrates "la beltà, la virtù, la fama onesta" of the Duchess in his poem. But he does not appear to have been enslaved by her charms. The great poet indeed had little love for princes, or for the rôle of a courtier, and had only been compelled to it by necessity, since his father, as he quaintly complains, had omitted to play the part of Saturn to his younger brothers and sisters, and had left nine to share with him the heritage which would have comfortably sufficed for one. His longing for the freedom which was the right of his genius, for leisure to serve the Muse who alone was his rightful sovereign, was as passionate as Dante's search for another and nobler "libertà." But though Court life was little to his taste it was the most sympathetic for his genius. The audience to which, in continuation of Boiardo, he now began to chant

"Le donne, i cavalier', l'arme, gli amori,"

took a traditional delight in such subjects, and were thoroughly able to appreciate the perfect art with which he presented them.

The production of the *Orlando Furioso* is an important event in the story of Ferrara. Ariosto's masterpiece is the culmination of the characteristic Ferrarese culture. The two opposite tendencies,



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the romantic and humanistic, always present in the thought and literature of this city, meet together in it in perfect harmony. The figures and stories borrowed from Boiardo and the old romance writers are enriched with all the classic knowledge and grace of style learnt by the poet from his communings with his literary ancestors, the Latins, while the whole poem breathes a magic and fantasy peculiarly Ferrarese. Its marvellous web, composed of a thousand gleaming threads which glance hither and thither, disappearing, reappearing, but ever leading up in subtly ordered sequence to the central scene, the great conflict at Paris between the kings of Christendom and Heathenesse, reminds one of those flowing decorations which are still to be seen on palace ceilings and walls in Ferrara, in which gods and goddesses, satyrs, loves and grotesques are woven together amid flowers and foliage in never-ending rhythmic succession. But in Ariosto floridness is restrained. The true characteristics of the Renaissance rule his spirit, perfect sanity, balance, reasonableness. He is the poetic embodiment of good sense, and his work, with its sensuous beauty and joyousness, expresses the Cinque cento in Ferrara at its best moment. The chivalry he depicts carries no longer its old religious meaning, but has become merely a beautiful convention, a rule of polite life. Yet the one great principle of loyalty to the sovereign remains, and this forms the moral of the poem. Ariosto gives us in it an ideal picture of the society around him and the ideas and sentiments which dominated it. And the lovely pastoral scenes, the glades where errant knights and damsels wander, the fountains and streams beside which they refresh themselves might be the green stretches of the Duke's Barco, the slow currents that veined the pleasaunces around the Castle, the lakes and fountains of the gardens

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of Belvedere which Alfonso made amid the sandy shallows of the Po.

And as the limpid serenity of the poem is repeatedly broken by a note of satire and disillusionment, so the polite calm of the circle to which it was addressed was disturbed by outbursts of brutal passion. Soon after Alfonso's accession an appalling tragedy took place in the House of Este. Among Lucrezia's ladies there was one whose charms had allured both Cardinal Ippolito and Don Giulio. There seems no doubt that this mysterious enchantress, whose name is never mentioned in the affair, was Angela Borgia, the fascinating kinswoman of the Duchess. One day the lady told Ippolito that his whole person was nothing worth to her in comparison with the eyes of his brother. A few days later, as Giulio was returning from the chase, the Cardinal lay in wait for him with a party of bravoës, who dragged the young prince from his horse, beat him to the ground, and pierced his eyes with sharp stakes, while Ippolito himself looked on. Giulio, blinded and bleeding, was brought back to Ferrara, and appearing before the Duke, demanded justice. Alfonso banished the Cardinal from Court, but Ippolito was all powerful with him and soon returned to Ferrara. Giulio, who recovered in time partial sight in one eye, was maddened by Alfonso's unbrotherly indifference to his wrongs and vowed revenge. He found sympathy from his brother, Ferrante. This prince, who seems to have been at once ambitious, weak and indiscreet, misjudged the Duke's character, scorning him for his mechanical tastes and his fondness for low company, and had already conceived a design of supplanting him on the throne. The two brothers formed a conspiracy to murder Alfonso and Ippolito, and to make Ferrante Duke. Two noblemen, named Boschetti and Roberti,

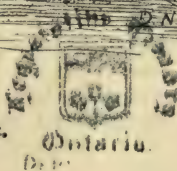
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were engaged in the plot, together with a certain Boccaccio, one of Ferrante's servants, and a singer named Gianni, a favourite of the Duke's, who had loaded him with benefits. But the conspirators delayed their double blow, unable to find a suitable opportunity, and hindered by the disputes of the two princes, each of whom insisted that the special object of his own hate should be the first victim. After a time the Cardinal grew suspicious of danger and warned Alfonso. Boschetti and Boccaccio were seized and a confession extracted from them by torture. Learning that their intended crime had been discovered, Giulio escaped to his sister at Mantua, but Ferrante went straight to the Duke and, falling down before him, implored his forgiveness. The offended sovereign was, however, so enraged that he struck the suppliant violently upon the face with the stick which he carried, blinding one of his eyes, and then commanded that he should be thrown into the dungeons.

Niccolò da Correggio was sent to Mantua to persuade Isabella and her husband to give up Don Giulio. Diplomatic considerations prevailed over affection and Isabella reluctantly relinquished the culprit. (She was mindful in spite of her grief to extract a promise from the poet ambassador to send her his poems on his return.) The princes were tried and condemned to death. A scaffold was erected in the midst of the great courtyard of the Castle, and on the day fixed for their execution the Duke and all the ambassadors in Ferrara, with the nobles and chief citizens, took their places on stages ranged around, while hidden behind a window the fair author of the tragedy was doubtless looking on. Ferrante and Giulio were led forth, each with his face marked by a brother's cruelty. They were already upon the scaffold, awaiting the stroke of the headsman, when the Duke suddenly



CASTLE DRAWBRIDGE,







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stayed the proceedings and granted them their lives, condemning them instead to perpetual imprisonment. This magnanimity was loudly praised by all. The princes were carried back into the dungeons, and were imprisoned, some say, in two separate cells, in the Torre de' Leoni. But other and more credible authorities tell us that they were confined in a decent chamber, and provided with some of the comforts of life. Thenceforth they were dead to the joyous world which dwelt in the halls above them. But one wonders if no memory of them ever shadowed those splendid scenes and dimmed the smile upon Lucrezia's lips—if the eyes of the fair Angela never clouded at the thought of those which her careless words had plunged into darkness.

Boschetti, Roberti and Boccaccio had already been beheaded on the public Piazza, and their quartered bodies were adorning the different gates of the city, while their heads, stuck upon lances, projected from the top of one of the towers of the Palazzo della Ragione. A miniature in an old book preserved in the Public Library gives a representation of this execution. For the unhappy Gianni, who was dragged out of the refuge to which he had fled in Rome and delivered up by Pope Julius to the master whose favours he had repaid with such ingratitude, Alfonso, forbidden by ecclesiastical law to kill him outright, as he was in priestly orders, devised a worse fate. The poor singing bird was hung up in an iron cage, clad in the thinnest of garments, outside the terrible Torre de' Leoni, exposed to the bitter cold of January and to the cruel gaze and exultation of the people. After a few days a napkin was put into his cage either by order of the Duke or the connivance of some merciful person, and the poor wretch ended his sufferings by hanging himself.

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These scenes of vengeance must have invested the Duke with a new terror for those who had hitherto regarded him lightly. And an event which happened two years later increased this sensation of dread. Early one morning, thirteen days after the marriage of Ercole Strozzi with the woman he had long loved, Barbara Torelli, herself a poetess of high order, the bridegroom was found lying dead, his body pierced with twenty-two wounds, a few paces from his home. The murder of this famous young poet, no more than twenty-seven years old, who, with Ariosto, was the pride of the Ferrarese Court, filled the whole world of fashion and letters with consternation and grief. Yet though the Duke was usually prompt in punishing such crimes, no steps were taken to trace the murderers and bring them to trial, and all Ferrara knew well that the guilt lay where justice could not reach. The name of the probable assassin, a servant of Alfonso's, is mentioned in a private letter from Ferrara a short time afterwards. And Madonna Barbara's allusion, in the exquisite sonnet with which she mourned her poet, to the cruel monster who had severed their dear tie, was plain to all who read it. The motive of the murder has never been disclosed. It has been generally attributed to a passion on the Duke's part for Ercole's bride or to his jealousy of the poet's favour with Lucrezia. Some have laid the guilt of it upon the Duchess herself, but only because the name of Borgia has been considered a sufficient explanation for any crime. The affair remains to this day one of the famous mysteries associated with the tyranny of the House of Este.

But the attention of Ferrara was soon to be diverted in dire fashion from thoughts of private passion and intrigue. The principality was fast being drawn into the troubles in which Italy had been

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nvolved ever since the fatal advent of the French at the end of the century before. In 1508 the belligerent Julius II. induced Spain and France to unite with him for the purpose of crushing Venice. This iniquitous combination, known as the League of Cambrai, started a new war, which was to devastate Italy for years. The Duke of Ferrara, faithful to the old friendship of his House for France, and eager for the overthrow of his domineering neighbour, was drawn into the league. He promptly banished the Venetian Visdomino and his hated tribunal from the city and made a vigorous attack upon Rovigo and the old territories of Este, now in the possession of the Venetians, while these were cowering under a great defeat by the allies at Ghiara d'Adda. But it was not long before they plucked up spirit and turned upon the foe nearest and most accessible to them. They recovered the places conquered by Alfonso and entered the Ferrarese territory with their fleets up the river, landing troops to burn and devastate the country, and in spite of Alfonso's artillery posted on the banks, they succeeded in ascending the main stream of the Po as far as the Polisella, and there building forts. Cardinal Ippolito, with a body of citizens and peasants hastily gathered together, made a spirited attack upon them there. But his force was too weak, the peasants fled and he was compelled to retreat. A tragic incident marked this fight. A beautiful youth named Ercole Cantelmo, with a companion as impetuous as himself, Alessandro Faruffino, had rushed too far into the enemy's defences, and embarrassed in the sandy bed of the river, had been unable to save himself by flight like his friend. His savage Schiavoni captors led him on to a ship, and there beheaded him in the sight of his father, the Duke of Sora, who stood helpless upon the bank. Ariosto tells the tale in his *Orlando* (Canto



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XXXVI.) to illustrate the barbarous manners which had replaced in his time the courtesy and generosity of the warriors of old.

The Duke was now compelled to retire into the city, whence he despatched a pressing appeal by the poet Ariosto to Rome for aid. French and Papal troops slowly approached and distracted the attention of the Venetians by attacking them in various directions, and the Ferrarese taking heart, issued from the city and encamped near the enemy. Alfonso's terrible guns, the biggest of which he named the *Gran Diavolo*, the *Terramoto*, and the *Regina*, were planted in favourable positions, and Ippolito, with the land forces, awaited his chance to attack. At last one day a sudden rise in the river lifted the Venetian ships and exposed them to the artillery. The Cardinal opened a furious cannonade at dawn, taking them by surprise and throwing them into confusion, and at the same time the Duke dropped down upon them in his ships from higher up the river. Every one of the Venetian ships, with the exception of the Commandant's, was either burned, sunk or captured, and their soldiers perished to the number of several thousands. The Cardinal completed the victory by assaulting the Venetian bastion and putting to the sword all the *Schiavoni* within, to revenge the murder of Cantelmo. This day was a glorious one for Ferrara. As the victors came down the river to the city, standing full armed and crowned with laurel wreaths in the midst of their spoils upon the captured galleys, like actors in a Roman triumph, they were greeted by the whole population with wild applause, and accompanied by the Duchess and all her ladies, they proceeded in solemn array to the *Duomo*, to give thanks and offer up the trophies of their victory.

A serious blow had been dealt to Venice. But it

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little profited Ferrara. Julius II. had no intention of utterly destroying the Republic, Italy's bulwark against the Turk, and having now thoroughly humbled her and wrested from her the Romagna, he detached himself from the league and made peace with the Venetians (1510). He despatched an imperious command to the Duke of Ferrara, bidding him as a feudatory of the Church to abandon the alliance of the French and desist from molesting Venice. Alfonso, unwilling to sacrifice his independence by acknowledging the direct authority of the Pope, refused to desert his allies, whereupon he was threatened with excommunication. Nevertheless he continued to fight, while despatching envoys to explain his position to the Pontiff. Ariosto was also sent "*per placar la grand' ira di Secondo,*" as he says, by Cardinal Ippolito, who was involved with his brother in the wrath of the terrible Julius. Instead of being softened, however, by the charming of the sweetest singer in Italy, the Pope could scarcely be restrained, we are told, from flinging Messer Lodovico into the sea. The Duke's ambassadors had no better success. Julius is said to have been embittered against Alfonso by the insinuations of Alberto Pio, the famous scholar and diplomatist, who hated the Estensi because of their pretensions to Carpi, the fief held by his house. But Julius needed no spur. His wrath with the Duke was calculated. To possess himself of Ferrara was a part of the large scheme entertained by this ambitious Pontiff, who dreamed of building up a mighty territorial power for the vicegerents of Christ. But the city of the Po was to prove too hard a conquest even for his imperious will.

Alfonso had now to face two formidable foes. On all sides he was invaded by Papal and Venetian armies. At the same time a Bull of Excommunica-

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tion, couched in terrific terms, fell upon him. He was denounced as the son of iniquity and the root of perdition, and a rebel to his liege lord the Pope, and his duchy was declared forfeit. Modena had already surrendered to the Pope's general, and the Papal troops, capturing town after town, drew near the capital. But the spectacle of the Duke's guns set along the river bank, guarding the south side of the city from Castel Tedaldo as far as S. Giorgio, gave them pause, and they lingered, afraid to attack him further. Meanwhile the Venetian fleets infested all the ramifications of the river and their soldiery preyed upon the country, and though the Duke attacked them continually with great vigour, he could not drive them out. His position was very desperate. The danger was delayed for the moment by the arrival of the French, who attacked Julius in the Modenese and Bolognese country. But, reinforced by Spanish help, the Pope soon turned with fresh fury against Alfonso. The Duke made ready for the onslaught. He called his people to the defence of their city, and all responded eagerly. The whole population worked at the fortification of the walls—nobles, doctors of the University, merchants, artisans, aged men, women and children, even the clergy. Alfonso assisted with his own hands, and the work went on day and night, till the city was girt with earthworks bristling with guns. Even Julius was daunted by the difficulty of the enterprise. He turned aside to attack the little city of Mirandola instead, and having overcome the gallant resistance of Francesca Trivulzia, widow of Count Lodovico Pico, who held the place for her young son, he returned to Bologna. Freed for the moment from anxiety for his capital, Alfonso with the help of the French continued to struggle courageously against the hostile troops that occupied his territories. In the spring of

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1511 the Pope suffered a heavy blow by the capture of Bologna by the French, assisted by the revolted people, who recalled their old lords, the Bentivogli, allies of the Estensi, with whom they had taken refuge. This event filled Ferrara with joy, and the Duke obtained the fragments of Michael Angelo's great bronze statue of the Pope which the Bolognese pulled down from the Church of St. Petronius, and out of them forged a monstrous cannon which he named the Giulia and placed in front of the Castle ready to greet his enemy. This insult did not soothe the Pope's feelings towards him. But true lover of art that he was, Alfonso carefully preserved the head, and placed this precious work of the divine sculptor in his own cabinet.

The Duke was now able to recover some of his lost territories. Julius, worried by a schism in the Sacred College and depressed by his reverses, had fallen sick. But he soon rose from his bed, with his famous cry "Fuori i barbari" still louder upon his lips, and more fierce than ever against Alfonso, whom he declared that it was God's will that he should chastise. He now formed with Venice, Spain and England a new combination against France and her allies, known to history by the ironic appellation of the Holy League. Hostilities broke out with fresh fury in North Italy, and the Duke of Ferrara had the satisfaction of seeing the French under their new commander, the young hero Gaston de Foix, sweep along on a course of victory. They relieved Bologna from the siege of the Spaniards, captured Brescia, and marched rapidly into the Papal territories of the Romagna, where they laid siege to Ravenna (1512). Alfonso, having defeated a Papal force at Zanniolo, had joined the French. The Spanish general Cardona was forced to approach to the relief of the beleaguered city, and on Gaston de Foix leading out his army to meet the foe, the famous battle



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of Ravenna took place, in which Alfonso d'Este had the honour, as we are told by Ariosto and many other writers, of giving to France "the great victory over Giulio and Spain" by the splendid service which he rendered with his guns. But the cost of the victory was dreadful. The dead on the French side were as numerous as on the other, and among them lay Gaston de Foix himself, his chivalrous course finished at twenty-five. The battle had been fought with a savage earnestness which horrified the Italians, who had been wont hitherto to conduct their warfare in a pleasant and bloodless style, like a game of skill and subtlety. They were now tasting the rude quality of the northern invaders. It mattered little who won the battles, for ally or enemy treated them with the same cruelty and licence afterwards. The shrewd Italians understood this and hated all the foreigners alike. When in the medley of the battle Alfonso's gunners had hesitated to fire lest they should wound their own allies, "Draw and do not fear to make a mistake," said the Duke, "*they are all our enemies.*" The hideous sack of Ravenna which ensued, contrary to the express conditions of its surrender, filled Italians of both parties with horror of the French. Fabrizio Colonna, one of the defeated generals, had yielded himself to the Duke of Ferrara on condition that he should not be given up to the foreigners, and Alfonso's courteous and generous treatment of this noble captive stood him in good stead soon after.

For Ravenna proved a victory barren of all but glory. The French, paralysed by loss of their commander, wasted time and opportunities, and Louis XII., threatened by England, Spain, and the Emperor Maximilian, was compelled to withdraw his arms from the Romagna. Alfonso d'Este found himself left alone to face the vindictive Pope, who had gathered new

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forces together and sent them to invade Ferrara once more. Again he set to work to strengthen the city walls, which in consequence of his continual necessity and the excellence of his engineers were becoming the most formidable military defences in Italy. To raise money for the exhausting struggle he had to apply to the usurers and pawn all his treasures, and even Lucrezia's jewels and the silver service of his table, which he is said to have replaced with majolica vessels of his own making. Meanwhile the French were fast losing all their possessions in Lombardy, and it was not long before the remnant of their army recrossed the Alps, abandoning Italy altogether. Bologna had once more been recovered for the Pope and the Bentivogli driven out, and the Duke himself was being closed in on every side by the advance of the Venetian and Papal troops.

In this predicament Alfonso resolved on the desperate expedient of throwing himself at the feet of his enemy and pleading his cause. By the mediation of Fabrizio Colonna, whom he released without exacting any ransom, the Pontiff was persuaded to grant him a safe conduct, which included a promise not to molest his states during his absence, and in gratitude for their kinsman's safety every member of the great Colonna house made himself a surety for the Duke's life. Leaving Cardinal Ippolito to govern for him, Alfonso set out, confiding in the good faith of His Holiness. He prostrated himself before Julius and humbly implored absolution, which was granted to him. But no further agreement could be reached. The Pope laid down absolutely impossible conditions of peace, nothing less than the surrender of the Duchy of Ferrara. He also demanded the release of Don Ferrante and Don Giulio. At the same time his armies seized Reggio and other towns belonging to

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the Duke, in direct contradiction of the terms of the safe conduct. He began to allege casuistical reasons for breaking his word, and it became evident that he intended to entrap his visitor. When Alfonso asked permission to leave Rome, he peremptorily refused and doubled all the guards at the gates. But the Colonna came to the rescue. Forcing the guards at the Lateran gate, they carried the Duke safely through and brought him to their Castle of Marino, where they kept him hid from the close search of the Pope. At the end of three months he was able to reach home, by the aid of Prospero Colonna, who took him in his train, disguised, it is said, now as a huntsman, now as a servant, now as a friar, each of which parts he played so skilfully that though there was a Papal spy on the lookout for him in the very company he was not discovered.

He found his dominions occupied on all sides by the enemy and nothing left to him but Ferrara, and the towns of Argenta and Commacchio to the east. With unconquerable spirit he made the last possible efforts to fortify the city against the attack now threatened by the furious Pope. But there seemed no spark of hope for Ferrara, when suddenly Fate intervened. Julius II. died.

A few weeks later, in March 1513, Giovanni dei Medici was elected Pope as Leo X. Alfonso, who had hastened to retake the territories of which he had been robbed, went in person to Rome to offer homage, and as he rode in the great coronation processson, in the most honourable place, he appeared to be completely restored to pontifical favour. He was soon to find however that Popes might change, but papal ambition remained the same, and that Leo, like Julius, would prove covetous of the kingdoms of the earth.

But there was a respite awhile for Ferrara. She

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was included in a peace between France and Venice, from whose attacks she was thus relieved. In this interval the Duke was able to replenish his sorely distressed treasury. His economy was as notable as his skill and determination in war. He laid enormous taxes on his subjects, and, unlike his predecessors, who judged it unbecoming for a gentleman to be taxed like a common "villano," he exacted from his nobles as much as a fourth part of their incomes. He increased the monopolies which Borso and Ercole had instituted, and his skilful merchandising in these commodities scandalised his contemporaries. Guicciardini, the Florentine historian, complains that by these dealings and by interfering in mechanical pursuits Alfonso was encroaching on the rights of his private subjects and was guilty of high treason against them. But the Duke's necessities were much too pressing to allow him to regard public opinion, except when it suited his schemes.

Meanwhile Ferrara still maintained her literary fame. Great scholars filled the chairs at the University and students from all parts attended it; the English especially came in large numbers at this time, constituting themselves in their insular fashion an order apart. But amid the alarms of war scholars and professors dispersed and intellectual interests languished. The golden moment of the Renaissance in Ferrara had in truth passed away, with many of the poets who had given it voice. The Strozzi were dead, Bembo and Tebaldeo had vanished to other spheres, Pandolfo Collenuccio had been long silenced by the headsman of Pesaro. A new generation of letters and science had arisen, younger Guarini, Celio Calcagnini, Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, Antonio Musa Brasavola. But the old poetic atmosphere had suffered a change. There was no longer the same inspiration and enthusiasm in



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the Court. The joyous spirit of the Duchess had begun to flag. Bembo's passion for her had long burnt out. The correspondence between them had soon grown merely courteous and friendly after he left Ferrara, and the soul of the poet, which sought its ideal of abstract love in many different forms of exterior "*bellezza*," had passed on from her to others. Like those that have tasted the pagan sweets of life too much in youth, her spirit, with its Christian need of pain, turned more and more to religious contemplation and penitential observances. Her delicate body was girdled by the rough cord of the Franciscan beneath its splendid outward garb; she spent many hours in prayers and tears in the Convent of *Corpus Domini*. Instead of slander and revilement, only praise of her piety, her virtue, her kindness to the poor was heard now. Trissino, the charming poet and courtier, the favourite of Isabella d'Este and Leo X., and welcomed in all the cultured Courts of Italy, spent some years in Ferrara from 1512, and was Bembo's successor in the Duchess's intimacy. But his discourse with her was of grave import—the education of her children, about which she was deeply concerned; the interests of her family and her husband's subjects; and his praises of her, as extravagant as those of her earlier adorers, dwell on her goodness, devotedness and self-denial, which are the qualities that according to this later admirer exalt her beside the Roman Lucrezia. The Galilean had reclaimed this fair goddess. When in 1519, a few days after the birth of a child, she felt herself dying, she directed that her body should be shrouded in the habit of a nun of the third order of her favourite community and laid in the little Church of *Corpus Domini*. In her last moments she indited a touching letter to Leo X. praying for his holy benediction, and recommending to him her consort



DOORWAY OFF PALAZZO SECRATI.



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and her children. A great weariness, calm and peace breathe from this letter. Lucrezia Borgia, for whom life had held much joy and much sorrow, was content to die.

The brilliant gaiety of the Cinquecento had full sway, nevertheless, in many of the great nobles' houses under the gentle presidency of some of those women of incomparable charm and tact, which that period had the special gift of producing. Here, in palaces and gardens that almost rivalled those of the Estensi themselves, noble-mannered young men and beautiful ladies would gather together, and laughter, raillery and light philosophic discourse pass round the circle, or some Bandello with tales of love, or Messer Lodovico himself with his gorgeous rhymes, hold it spellbound.

Ariosto's fame had by this time carried Ferrara to the highest point of her literary glory and given her the undisputed supremacy in poetic achievement over all the rest of Italy. In 1516 he had completed the *Orlando Furioso*. It was dedicated to his patron, Cardinal Ippolito, whose name is celebrated in it with the most fulsome adulation. He is lauded as a shining example of all the virtues in which he was conspicuously deficient. The whole work is an apotheosis of la Casa d'Este, of whose glory Ippolito is depicted as the crown and perfection. But when the poet knelt to offer this incomparable tribute to his lord it was received with scorn. "Dove avete trovato tutte queste corbellerie?" ("Where have you found all this nonsense?") is said to have been the Cardinal's only remark. This phrase is probably apochryphal, but Virginio Ariosto himself records that his father was told by Ippolito that he would have done better by attending to the services of his prince than by spending his time composing his book. This ungracious reception of the poem increased the discontent with Court service



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which already filled Ariosto's soul. In his *Satires* the poet gives us an intimate revelation of his weariness and disillusionments, yet with an enchanting gaiety and sweetness of temper, free from bitterness. Life brimmed with sweets for Ariosto, and his only complaint is the want of leisure to taste them. He cared no whit for the splendours or luxury of Court life—a turnip which he cooks himself in his own house and eats off a stick for a fork tastes better to him than partridges or wild boar at another's table. He knows well that he departs from the opinion of the majority, who esteem it greatness to dwell at the Court; to him on the contrary it is slavery—

“Mal puo durar il rosignuolo in gabbia;  
Piu vi sta' il cardellino, e piu il fanello;  
La rondine in un di vi muoia di rabbia.”<sup>1</sup>

(*Satire* III.)

In 1517 the poet finally lost the good graces of Ippolito d' Este by refusing on the ground of indifferent health to accompany his patron on a visit to Hungary in the depths of winter. The Cardinal displayed great displeasure and deprived him of a large part of the revenues with which he had endowed him. Ariosto was now in a predicament. If singing the high deeds and valour of Ruggiero had brought him so little into the graces of that hero's progeny, what was he to do? But la Casa d' Este was not altogether unmindful of the glory which his great epic had shed upon its name. Duke Alfonso appointed the poet a gentleman of his own household, and proved a far more considerate master than the Cardinal. Ariosto himself allows that the service of the Duke pleased him since it called

<sup>1</sup> “Ill can the nightingale endure a cage;  
Longer the goldfinch will abide in it, longer the linnet;  
The swallow in one day dies there of rage.”

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him but rarely from his "native nest" and so molested his studies little, nor took him from the place from which he could not altogether depart, seeing his heart remained there always. For Ferrara held the woman upon whom by this time the errant affections of the poet had lastingly settled. Alessandra Benucci was a Florentine lady and widow of Tito Strozzi. Ariosto, who had known her long, became suddenly enamoured of her at a great festa in Florence in 1513, where of all the solemn spectacles he remembered little but only that in all the beautiful city he saw nothing more beautiful than her.

"Sol mi resto immortale  
Memoria, ch' io non vidi in tutta quella  
Bella città, di voi cosa più bella."

The mysterious unnamed lady in the hall of famous women in the *Orlando* (Canto XLII.) interposed between Lucrezia Borgia and Beatrice d'Este, and who surpasses all the rest as the star of Venus does its fellows, is this mistress of Ariosto's, and her supporter is the poet himself.

Cardinal Ippolito only lived a few years after the rupture with Ariosto. His violent and self-indulgent life was ended in 1520 in characteristic fashion by a surfeit of roast crabs. Meanwhile Ferrara was plunged in new difficulties. In spite of solemn engagements on the Pope's part to restore Modena and Reggio, seized by Julius, the Duke was still bereft of these states, and it was growing evident that Leo, whose chief ambition was to exalt his own family, aimed at adding Ferrara to the dominions of the Medici. He did not scruple to use treacherous means of gaining his end. His spies were busy in Ferrara, and the Duke had to be on the watch for constant plots against his life. At the same time Alfonso spared no pains to gain friends for him-

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self. He plied the monarchs of France, Spain and England with flatteries and costly gifts, hoping for their help to recover his lost provinces. But he was only a minor factor in the complicated game played by greater powers, and in the ever-shifting combinations into which they entered his ruin or his salvation was determined upon to suit their selfish ends.

Thus in 1521 he found himself threatened by grave danger. One of the terms of a league formed between Charles V. and the Pope against France was the conquest of Ferrara for the Church, on the old pretext that Alfonso was a rebel against his feudal superior. The Duke immediately threw in his lot with Francis I. and hastened to attack Modena. But he only succeeded in drawing the armies of the league upon himself. His outlying territories were occupied and he himself was pursued in his retreat far into the Ferrarese country, the enemy penetrating to Bondeno, a little town only a few miles above the capital. But there they were checked by the great guns which had served Alfonso so well in former times. These could not defend him, however, from the excommunication which now, for the second time, fell upon him. His allies the French were giving way before the Imperialists, and again it seemed as if Ferrara were doomed to fall. The old desperate preparations for defence were renewed, the formidable walls were furnished with artillery, and prince and people resolved to sell their city dearly. But fortune, which never wholly abandoned Alfonso, now stepped in once more, and by the sudden death of Leo X. in November 1521 he was saved from ruin.

The Duke's joy at this unexpected relief was unbounded. He had coins struck with his head on one side, and on the reverse a shepherd rescuing a lamb from the mouth of a lion, with the motto "*De manu*

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leonis." In the new Pontiff he saw hope at last of release from the persecution he had suffered from the Church. Adrian VI., the devout Flemish priest, had no ambition except to reform the Church and overcome the paganism which had invaded the Vatican. He lifted the interdict from Ferrara, confirmed Alfonso in the possessions of the Duchy, and promised the restitution of Modena and Reggio. But he died in 1523, and Ferrara was dismayed afresh by the election of Giulio dei Medici as Clement VII., who soon proved himself as much resolved to despoil the Estensi as his cousin Leo had been. But in the great struggle which had now begun between Charles V. and Francis I. for the ever-disputed possession of Lombardy, the alliance of Ferrara was an important object to both parties, and King and Emperor both strove with flattering offers to secure the Duke's friendship. Alfonso took the utmost advantage of this position to further his own ends. No sense of loyalty or respect for old engagements towards France hindered him from making compacts with the Emperor when Charles was the most likely to serve his turn. But the successes of France in 1524 made him waver again to the side of the French, whom he assisted with money and troops till the tremendous victory of the Imperialists at Pavia (1525), which decided the supremacy of Charles V. in Italy, convinced him that he was on the wrong side. By a timely subsidy of 50,000 crowns of gold he restored himself to the favour of the Emperor. He still shilly-shallied, however, between the two sides, anxious to make the best terms for himself. But he was estranged from the league between France and the Pope by the obstinacy of Clement, who would not give up his claims upon Ferrara, and who taunted him with want of patriotism in not helping in the work of driving the Spaniards



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out of Italy. Not only the Duke but all his subjects would call in the aid of the grand Turk or the devil himself rather than be enslaved by priests, cried a Ferrarese ambassador. Alfonso at last declared himself definitely for the Emperor by sending his artillery to assist the Commander Frundsberg with his army of Swiss mercenaries to cross the Po in the face of a strong force of the French and effect a junction with the Constable of Bourbon (1527). The second shot laid low the famous Medicean Captain, Giovanni delle Bande Nere, who was in command of the French, and thus dealt a heavy blow to the league. The Swiss carried the day and succeeded in joining the Imperial army under the Constable, and the united forces now swept everything before them. They encamped near Bologna and overspread the country around, pillaging the inhabitants. But though victorious the troops were unfed and unpaid, and were consumed by rage and despair. Their mutinous temper drove their general for safety to Ferrara, and Frundsberg himself was overcome by the terrible cares of his position, and, struck by apoplexy, was carried to Alfonso's capital to die. The presence of the Imperial army so near to them was a terror to the Ferrarese, and in order to get rid of it the Duke—if we may believe his enemies—committed a second treachery to his country by suggesting to the Constable of Bourbon that he should march upon the Eternal City. The idea, though it did not originate with Alfonso, was certainly encouraged by him in every way, and it could not have been without joy that the victim of so much papal hostility saw the Spaniards set forth on that fatal rush which ended in the sack of Rome.

When this dire misfortune befell the Pope and he lay a captive in St. Angelo, the Duke hastened to profit by the helplessness of his enemy and to repossess

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himself of Modena, of which he had been robbed so long by papal greed. Now at last the end for which he had so valiantly struggled was accomplished, and the state which his father had bequeathed to him was restored to its integrity. His turn had come. His alliance was sought with the most splendid offers by the Holy League, newly revived against the triumphant Emperor. The full possession of all his dominions was to be confirmed to him, and the hand of no less a personage than Renata of France, daughter of Louis XII., was promised for his son Ercole, besides other great honours and advantages. The vision of great things to be won by such a marriage, perhaps even of a kingdom of North Italy for la Casa d'Este, to be founded by his son with the support of his powerful kinsmen, floated before the eyes of the Ferrarese prince. Always secretly inclined to France, he accepted these terms and abandoned the Imperial cause. When, however, at the end of the year, Clement regained his freedom and refused to ratify the treaty made by his allies with the Duke, Alfonso began once more to fear the mutations of fortune. In the hostilities which now broke out anew in Italy he succeeded however in keeping neutral, and Ferrara was spared the unspeakable horrors of blood and rapine which a great part of the country suffered at the hands of the northern troops, who laid it desolate as a wilderness.

But the pestilence and famine which crowned the misfortunes of Italy in 1527 and 1528 came to Ferrara as to the rest. With this period of agony, with the submission of the Papacy to the foreigner, sealed by the coronation of Charles V. at the hand of Pope Clement in 1530, and finally with the ruin of the Florentine Republic, Italy's independent life comes to an end. Above all, it is the close of the bright short

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epoch of her liberty of spirit. The moment is sharply marked in Ferrara by the appearance there of a new personality, which stands out in curious contrast to the light-hearted society of that Renaissance city. In 1528, just when the plague had spread deepest gloom over the people, Ercole d'Este brought home his little deformed northern bride, Renata of France, to be Queen of the Court where Lucrezia Borgia had reigned and which was now adorned by the beautiful Laura Dianti, Alfonso's mistress, whom he is said to have married just before his death. The citizens, bidden by ducal order to lay aside their sable garments, could not put off the mourning from their hearts as they silently watched the gorgeous spectacle of the princess's reception, and the plain, misshapen little person with the large, sad, intelligent eyes, who so unsuitably filled the part of goddess in it. With the French princess and her serious-minded train a new invasion of northern ideas was coming to Ferrara, and the city which had given such a splendid reception to the great humanistic and artistic revival of the fifteenth century was now to experience the influence of that great stirring of men's minds and consciences which makes the history of the sixteenth century.

But this new movement was hardly felt while Alfonso lived. This prince loved pleasure and threw himself into it in the intervals of war and negotiation with the rude energy of his nature. The paganism and sensuousness of the early Cinquecento were reflected in his temperament. Its voluptuous art delighted him, and he was an eager patron of the great painters of his time. An artist much favoured by him was the Ferrarese Dosso, who shared the romantic vision of his great contemporary Ariosto. Pelegrino da Udine was another painter who worked a great deal for the Duke. But the artist whom Alfonso plied the most eagerly

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with commands was Titian. He would himself choose the subjects and write the most detailed directions as to how they were to be depicted, drawing the particulars from the descriptions of classic writers. Titian, in answering, would declare that his instructions were so beautiful and so ingenious that he did not know how anyone could imagine anything better, and with courtly flattery he would imply a comparison between his patron and the great princes of antiquity, to whose intelligent commands was due the sublime art of the ancient painters. The artist rejoiced in the subjects given him, which were of a nature that suited the rich and sensuous character of his genius. The Bacchus and Ariadne of the National Gallery was painted for Alfonso and once adorned the Castello, together with two other of Titian's most famous pictures, the Sacrifice to Venus and the Arrival of Bacchus in the Island of Naxos, both now in Madrid. Titian also painted many portraits for the Duke, among them one of Alfonso and Laura together, which is generally supposed, without much ground, however, to be the famous Lady with the Mirror and the Cavalier, in the Louvre.

The busy painter had much ado to content the desires of the impatient Duke. But he met the constant importunities of Alfonso's envoys with admirable good humour. Not so the more irritable Michael Angelo, from whom the Duke commanded a picture of Leda and the Swan and sent his ambassador to report on the progress of the work. This personage was no judge of art. "Oh, this is a poor thing" (*poca cosa*), he exclaimed on seeing the picture, whereupon the artist drily asked him what his profession was. "I am a merchant," was the answer. "Well," said Michael Angelo, "you have trafficked ill for your master this time; be off!" and he put the envoy out and bestowed



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the Leda on one of his pupils, deeply offending the Duke. Alfonso had become personally acquainted with the great artist in 1529, when the latter was sent by the Signory of Florence to study the famous military walls of Ferrara, in view of the necessity of increasing the fortifications of their city against the threatened attack of the Pope and Spain. He was received with the utmost honour by the Duke, who himself accompanied him on his inspection and indicated the noteworthy points of the constructions. From Raphael also Alfonso did not fail to demand pictures. The artist promised certain works, of which the subjects were agreed upon, but year after year passed and they were not done. The Duke sent continual messages to urge their completion, and Raphael tried to pacify him by sending him presents of the cartoons of some of his other pictures. But Alfonso lost patience at last, learning from his ambassador how he had found the artist working on the nearly finished Transfiguration for the Cardinal Giulio de' Medici and the Duke's canvas placed against the wall with several others on top of it. He wrote a furious letter, bidding the ambassador tell Raphael that such as he were not to be put off by vain words, and that if the artist did not fulfil his engagements he must expect one of these days something which he would not like. Such discourteous threats to one whose art had raised him to the fellowship of sovereigns were outrageous. Yet after this we find Raphael still politely endeavouring to propitiate the prince, and only a few days before his death sending Alfonso a design for chimneys that would not smoke, to remedy an inconvenience with which the inhabitants of the Castello were troubled.

The Drama continued to flourish in Ferrara under Alfonso. Besides the old classical favourites, the comedies of Ariosto and other modern writers were

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represented, under the superintendence of Messer Lodovico himself. Ariosto was now enjoying in the last years of his life a peace and content such as he had never tasted before, after having undergone a bitter exile from 1522 to 1524. Owing to the Duke's wars and embarrassments, the stipend allowed to the poet had been stopped, and Ariosto, reduced to great straits, had been forced to ask his lord to give him some more important post or allow him to seek service elsewhere. Whereupon Alfonso despatched him as governor to Garfagnana, an unruly district in the Apennines on the extreme edge of the ducal dominions. Here in the utterly unsuitable occupation of rooting out brigandage and adjudicating upon the eternal complaints, litigations, thefts and "vendette" of his subjects, and almost deserted by his Muse, the mild-souled poet passed two miserable years. Except for occasional visits to Ferrara, or, as he says himself, if he had not been every five or six months one of those who walked between the Duomo and the two statues of his Marchesi (Niccolò III. and Borso at the entrance to the ducal palace), he should have been dead, or more lean than they who stand in Purgatory hungering for the apple :

"E s'io non fossi, d'ogni cinque o sei  
Mesi, stato uno a passeggiar fra il duomo  
E le due statue de' marchesi miei  
Da sì noiosa lontananza domo  
Già sarei morto, o più di quelli macro  
Che stan bramando in purgatorio il pomo."  
(*Satire VII.*)

His efforts to restore order in Garfagnana were in vain, and at last in despair he appealed to the Duke to relieve him of the task and returned to Ferrara, where he found the Muses again and wandered once more with them, composing poems "beneath the sacred

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fronds." His circumstances grew more easy. The *Orlando* had met with enormous success. It was nine times reprinted between 1524 and 1527. The services required of him were light and not uncongenial. He designed the staging and scenery for the Court plays, and managed the performances, sometimes himself appearing to recite the prologues. But his chief occupation was revising and adding to his *Orlando*, "never a day passing that he was not at it both with his pen and with his thoughts." In 1527 he was able to build himself a small house with his savings, and in this pleasant dwelling, which we may see to this day, he passed his latter years, busied between his poem and his garden, which he loved almost as much, rejoicing at last in the freedom for which he had always yearned. With his death in 1533 the great period of the Renaissance in Ferrara closes.

The peace which had come to Messer Lodovico was withheld from his lord. To the end of his life Alfonso d'Este's vigilance and political ability were taxed to the uttermost to save him from destruction. In 1529 Clement VII., abandoning the Holy League, made peace with the Emperor, who undertook to restore Modena and Reggio to him, and to aid him in conquering Ferrara. Now might Alfonso well feel himself lost. He was entirely abandoned by the King of France, who, in accordance with the peace which he made with Charles V. at Cambray in this same year, withdrew altogether from Italy. The Duke had never before, in all his many perils, found himself in such an apparently hopeless position. By supreme address he extricated himself. The Emperor having occasion to pass by Modena, Alfonso, who had held the city since 1527, received and entertained him and all his Court and following with the utmost magnificence at his own cost, and made so favourable an impression



STREET LOOKING TOWARDS PIAZZA DEL DUOMO.





THE END OF THE WORLD

## *Shocks and Alarms*

upon Charles that he promised to intercede for him with the Pope. In the Congress which followed later at Bologna the Emperor was so won over by the Duke's adroit gifts and pleadings that Clement VII. was forced to agree that the quarrel between the Church and Ferrara should be submitted to Charles's arbitration. The Imperial decision, which was promulgated in 1531, adjudged the states of Modena and Reggio to Alfonso, who was also to receive reinvestiture of the Duchy of Ferrara from the Pope on payment of 100,000 ducats. The annual tribute to the Church was to be largely increased. This sentence infuriated the Pope. He refused absolutely to recognise it, and assembling troops in Bologna, Romagna and Tuscany, threatened attack upon Ferrara. But Alfonso's vigorous preparations made him relinquish the rash intention.

The Duke, supported by the favour of the Emperor, which he was careful to keep by continual gifts and flattery, even offering some of his most precious art treasures as a sacrifice to Charles's greed, could now afford to scorn his enemies. He had repossessed himself of his whole principality and even added to it by securing from Charles V., for a large sum of money, the investiture of Carpi, the old heritage of the Pii. This was his triumph over his enemy Alberto Pio, who died in poverty in Germany, and thus was the curse of the poor prisoner in Castello Vecchio fulfilled upon the third generation of his usurping kinsmen.

A respite from his long-drawn-out troubles was come to the much harassed Duke. Yet while Clement lived and still persisted in his refusal of the reinvestiture of Ferrara, he could not be free from anxiety. To his immense joy a prospect of lasting peace came before long. In July 1534 Clement VII. died, the

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third and last of the Popes against whose hate and ambition it had been his destiny to struggle. Paul III., elected a few weeks later, was well-disposed towards la Casa d'Este.

But, as if his stout and tempest-beaten spirit could not endure without the stimulus of a continual wrestle with fortune, hardly was his enemy safe in his grave before Alfonso d'Este himself sickened. He died on the last day of October 1534. He had the satisfaction of bequeathing to his son the whole and undivided dominion of his House, rescued from dangers and difficulties such as few princes had faced and overcome. The salvation of Ferrara was a triumph of military ability and extraordinary political dexterity. The diplomatic gifts which had always distinguished his family were more marked in Alfonso, in answer to his necessities, than in any of his predecessors. Pitted against the strongest power in Italy, the Papacy, and called upon to combat such fine cunning as that of the Medici, he defended himself as successfully by his wit as by his famous guns. His methods are a striking example of the fine art to which the Italy of his day had brought politics. Supple and unscrupulous, he bent himself to circumstances without regard for faith or honour; now defying, now cringing to his foes—outraging his allies again and again by his inconstancy, but recovering himself by a personal address and ability which won him greater respect than virtue could have from that generation. But above all Alfonso owed his triumph to the wealth which he commanded. It was his ducats which won him the friendship of Emperor or King and redeemed his disloyalties. His people had to pay the price. Their burdens were terrible, and the exhausting and continuous drain upon its resources was beginning to tell heavily upon the State.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Decadence*

Ahi ahi l'ora nefanda ! Dal Tebro fiutando la preda  
la lupa vaticana s'abbatte su l'Eridano.

CARDUCCI.

PEACE was come again to Ferrara and was to endure virtually unbroken till the end of her existence as an independent State. The new era was not, however, one of exuberant life, like her golden age, but rather the quiet which precedes the end. The day of the smaller Italian powers was over. Ferrara was one of the few that had survived the encroachments of the Church and of Spain, but her continued existence depended largely on the favour of these greater powers. Outwardly she appeared more important than ever, in consequence of the union of la Casa d'Este with the House of France. But this triumph of Alphonso I.'s statesmanship proved only an embarrassment to his son, Duke Ercole II. The French had succumbed in Italy to the Spaniards, and it was the Emperor who, all supreme at Rome, was virtually the arbiter of the destinies of Ferrara. For the long-standing dispute between the Estensi and the Church was not yet settled. Paul III. still delayed to confirm the decision of Charles V. in 1531 by reinvesting Ercole with the Duchy, and though he left him unmolested, the papal claim was a sword suspended over the Duke's head. Ercole, sagacious and dispassionate as his fathers, anxious above all to avoid war, recognised the vital importance of keeping the



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Emperor's favour. But Francis I., determined to restore the French power in Italy, was bent on drawing the Duke to his side against Charles, and for this end exerted his private and family influence upon him to the utmost. This political struggle, invading his palace and taking the shape of miserable domestic intrigues and strife, is at the bottom of the tragic and somewhat sordid story of Ercole II.'s reign.

In the Duchess Renata, France had a passionate partisan. This lady was not happy. She could not adapt herself to her new country. For her serious, melancholy temperament, insensible to poetry or art, to the delights of the theatre and the pleasures of the Court, Ferrara had no allurements. Her discontent was increased by seeing the expulsion of her countrymen from Italy, and the failure of the ambitious hope which she had cherished, of her husband establishing a powerful Italian kingdom with their aid. She felt herself abandoned among strangers; Ercole's political caution would not allow her even to revisit her dear land. Conscious always that she was a great king's daughter, she was offended by the pettiness of the Ferrarese Court, and, above all, by her husband's frugality. Ercole, who was embarrassed by the financial difficulties created by the late wars, was also inclined to niggardliness. The extravagance of Renata and her French household was the subject of his constant complaints, while her friends were loud in their indignation at his meanness.

“Mais ce fascheux, ingrat, et pire encore  
Voudroit réduire en petite signore  
La fleur de lys que tout le monde honore  
D'affection.”

But Renata's patriotism, which was not moderated by tact, was the real cause of the differences which

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soon became notorious between this husband and wife. Proud, tenacious, and yet weak, she lacked the suppleness and charm of those great Renaissance ladies who knew how to make themselves leaders of men. She could not stoop to propitiate her husband's subjects. She would not learn their language, or renounce her French dress for the Portuguese modes used in Ferrara. Her attendants, chosen by Francis I., formed a centre of French intrigue in the very heart of Ercole's Court, and foiled in their attempts to persuade the Duke into alliance with their master, they revenged themselves by spreading slanders abroad about his treatment of Renata. Ercole was especially troubled by Madame de Soubise, the princess' chief lady, who had been long attached to the French Court, a woman of learning and high repute, but querulous and intriguing, who, with her daughter, the charming Anne de Partenay, wife of M. de Pons, had great influence over Renata. He endured her presence long out of respect for the French King, but in 1535 he gained the consent of Francis to send her back to France, where she immediately spread abroad accusations against the Duke of cruelty to his wife and of vicious conduct. Ercole, writing to defend himself, declares in respect to one especially gross charge, that were he as guiltless of all sins as of that one, he doubts not but that God would have to give him the place of St. Francis in heaven.

His domestic perplexities were aggravated by the Duchess's preoccupation with the religious ideas which were agitating the conscience and politics of Europe. The Court from which Renata had come was used to discuss doctrinal questions, and to criticise the corruption of papacy and priesthood with the frank fearlessness of the Renaissance spirit. Francis I. himself played with the novel subject of theology, and his

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sister, Margaret of Navarre, was one of the leaders of the new movement. Madame de Soubise and most of Renata's train brought with them the fashionable habit of speculation. This did not, however, involve revolt from the Church, and Renata herself, daughter of the pious Anne of Brittany, was a good Catholic when she came to Ferrara. But her very devoutness inclined her to the dangerous study of theology, and she was soon brought into close relations with the Reformers. When Francis I., finding the spread of the new doctrines inconvenient, began to make holocausts of heretics, many fugitives from France sought the protection of their countrywoman in Ferrara, among them the poets Leon Jamet and Clément Marot, the latter commended by his friend Margaret of Navarre to Renata's favour. The Duchess welcomed her compatriots with joy, and her apartments became a centre for free discussion on the burning doctrinal questions of the day. From the Court the infection spread to the city, where already Lutheran opinions were penetrating with the German professors and students who came to study at the University. Ferrara received the new thinkers with the sympathy which she had always shown for every manifestation of the human mind, and the Duke, bred up in that Renaissance circle over which the sweet and reasonable spirit of Ariosto had brooded, accorded them the noble hospitality and toleration traditional in his House.

But conditions had changed. The moment for the full enjoyment of all that the mind could grasp was over for Ferrara and for Italy. Hard and fast lines were forming in the world of thought and were reflecting themselves in politics. The French refugees were a grave embarrassment for Ercole. France, though Catholic at home, stood for the Protestant

cause abroad in opposition to Spain, and to shelter French heretics was to awake the suspicions of Rome and of the Emperor. All, however, might have been well had they but lived quietly, "*da buon Cristiano*," as the Duke desired of them. But in 1536, just when war was impending between France and Spain, and it behoved him to preserve the most careful neutrality, they began to make open demonstration against the practices of the Church, and a cry of idolatry raised during the Adoration of the Cross on Holy Saturday created a great stir. A political design to force a breach between the Duke and the Church party was probably concealed in this outburst. But Ercole, though he hated the public scandal, hastened to appease the offended Vatican by proceedings against the heretics. Most of them, however, being his wife's servants, he contented himself with requiring them to submit to the examination of an Inquisitor. Rather than do this, Clément Marot fled, but some of the others were imprisoned. The Duchess was outraged by this raid upon her household. She despatched bitter complaints and lamentations to Francis I., who, disappointed in his hopes of Ercole's support against Spain, plied the Duke with furious accusations of ill-treating his wife; while Clément Marot, in his new refuge at Venice, repaid Ercole's hospitality by immortalising the slanders already spread against him in a famous canzone in which the woes and loneliness of Renata and the cruelty of her husband are movingly described. "*Peu d'amys a quiconques est loing d'eulx*," he cries.

It was Renata's dignity that was offended rather than her religious sentiments. Yet at this very moment a new influence had entered her life and was giving a definite direction to her opinions. She was visited by the great French reformer Calvin. The



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movements of this interesting person in Ferrara are wrapt in mystery. Tradition relates that, a fugitive from persecution, under an assumed name and character, he sought the protection of the pious Renata, who appointed him her professor of theology; that being suspected as a heretic he was seized and carried to Bologna, to be judged by the papal authorities, and that on the way he escaped, through the secret machinations of the Duchess. This story is confirmed to some extent by recent researches. That Calvin was in Ferrara about 1536 seems certain, and there is much reason for believing that he was one of those imprisoned in consequence of the Protestant outbreak, of which he was very probably the instigator, and that he was enabled to escape—not, however, on the road to Bologna, but from the communal prison in the Palazzo della Ragione. And who so likely to have power to draw his prison-bars as his patroness Renata?

The scarcely noted passage of this stern spirit left deep traces in Ferrara. The Duchess and her circle fell under the spell of his powerful mind. Renata corresponded with him constantly afterwards, seeking his advice on questions of faith and conduct, and thenceforth repugnance to the Catholic doctrine professed by her husband unquestioningly, as behoved a vassal of the Church, mingled in her with opposition to his political course, to work the ruin of their domestic peace.

Renata's melancholy figure typifies for Ferrara the reaction from the Renaissance ideal of a life beautiful in and for itself. Her presence laid a sobering spell upon that romantic and corrupt Court, which, though it danced and feasted still, had lost the old spontaneous joyousness. The finer spirits of the day disdained worldly pleasures, preferring a meditative quiet. Art was fast degenerating into banality, poetry

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had lost its wings. Music, saddest and sweetest of the arts, alone flourished. The Duke, like all of his House, was an impassioned lover of music and employed many famous musicians, such as Adrian Brumel, Josquin du Pré, Adriano Willaert, Michele Jan, Cipriano de Rore, to compose works for him or conduct the choirs of the ducal chapel and of the Duomo.

Even the cultivation of letters flagged somewhat at this time. The University declined greatly under Ercole II. Philosophy was beginning to lose its independence and stifle itself in pedantry. A characteristic sign of the intellectual spirit of the age is the rise of Academies, societies which, while they effected much for learning, were inclined to bind thought in rules and depress art by over subtle criticism. The first of these in Ferrara was the Elevati, founded in 1540 by Celio Calcagnini and Alberto Lollio, only to perish quickly and to be succeeded by others more lasting.

But the energy of every serious mind was absorbed in religious questionings. The desire for reform had invaded the Church herself and thousands of her most loyal children sympathised with the ideas of the Protestants and echoed their cry for a purer faith and practice. The dividing line between heresy and orthodoxy was as yet but uncertainly drawn. Renata herself professed reverence and dutifulness towards the Pope. And a dear friend of hers was the poetess, Vittoria Colonna, whose noble genius and spiritual fervour made her one of the glories of the Catholic Reform party. This lady, widow of the Marquis of Pescara, visited the city more than once, and dwelt there long in affectionate intimacy with Renata, quitting "*la dolcissima Ferrara*" only with the greatest regret. Friend of Cardinals Contarini, Giberti and

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Pole, comrade in soul of Michael Angelo, she had many points of sympathy also with the royal pupil of Calvin. She introduced the lately instituted order of Cappucini, one of the signs of the new Catholic zeal, into Ferrara, with the celebrated Bernardino Ochino of Siena at their head. The fervent oratory of this friar drew crowds to the Duomo, who little suspected his piety and earnestness of the taint of heresy for which he was condemned later by the Church. Vittoria helped also to establish in Ferrara another newly risen religious body, destined to restore the authority of the Church by that very dogmatic narrowness which she and her friends had striven to break through. In 1537 a few Jesuit brethren, recommended by the pious Marchioness to Ercole's favour, settled in the city and began to teach and preach with the spirit of self-sacrifice and single-minded devotion which was to make their order one of the powers of the world. Later on they set up schools for the young, which soon excelled all others in popularity. Men like the novelist Cinthio (Gian Battista Giraldi), who kept alive the romantic traditions of Ferrara in his famous tales, looked with fear and foreboding on these newcomers that were to bind the old free soaring spirit of the Renaissance. Thus all the religious forces that were breaking up the fair sinful world of the last generation were represented in this city, where also an agnostic philosophy, destined to shake the foundations of faith altogether in many minds, had already entered with Pomponazzo, when he lectured at the University in 1510. At the same time, in the midst of the general break-up of old ideas, signs were showing of the spirit that was to possess the future. Here, where in 1503 the great Copernicus had taken his degree at the university, men of European repute like Celio Calcagnini, and Antonio Musa Brasavola, the

ducal physician, were giving the city distinction in the fields of science.

The Duke's attitude towards all the divers opinions in his State was still tolerant. Having quieted the heretics by his severity in 1536 and redeemed his character as a Catholic sovereign, he was glad to let things be. Many of his own servants held the new opinions. Renata continued to shelter avowed Protestants, besides entertaining at her Court all those serious and exalted thinkers who were to be cast out later by an intolerant Church. Ochino, Peter Martyr, Celio Secondo Curione, Alciati, the tutor of Calvin, were frequent visitors, together with men less open in imparting their thoughts to the world, like Celio Calcagnini again, and Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, newly returned, broken down by sufferings in the sack of Rome, to his native city. And noble ladies, Lavinia della Rovere, Guilia Rangone and others openly shared the princess's views.

Rome, however, though well aware of Ferrara's errors, did not refuse to come to an accommodation with the Duke, and in 1539 the long-standing differences were settled. Formal reinvestiture of the Duchy was granted to Ercole, and to the heirs of his body, but the payment of 180,000 ducats and an increased annual tribute of 7000 ducats was required in return. Benvenuto Cellini, who was in Ferrara about this time, describes the dismay of an old ducal treasurer, Giolamo Giglioli, when ordered to pay this money. "This old man could not bear that so great a sum should be given to the Pope, so that he ran about the streets crying out aloud, 'Duke Alfonso would rather have taken Rome with his money than have given it to the Pope.' " He would obey no order for paying it, and when forced at last to do so fell so ill that he nearly died. His distress was probably not



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caused only by the avarice to which Benvenuto attributes it. To have to make such terms at all was a humiliation for Ferrara, which under her last sovereign had so courageously defied the terrors of Julius II. and the insidious schemes of the Medicean Popes.

All other questions were also settled. Ferrara appeared fully restored to pontifical grace. The Duke's brother, Ippolito, was made a cardinal, and the city was favoured in 1843 by a state visit from the Pope, accompanied by a train of 3000 persons, which included many cardinals and great prelates. Among the thousands of strangers who thronged the city on this famous occasion and took part in the festivities was Titian, from whose canvases we still seem to catch some reflection of the golden glories of the Renaissance at that moment of its ripeness, which decay was about to touch.

Paul showed special kindness to Renata during this visit. But the day of toleration was passing away. The example of Spain had brought about the establishment of the Holy Office in Rome in 1542, and the vigilant eyes of the new institution were turned upon the Duchess of Ferrara, whose errors were becoming more and more evident. She no longer took part in the sacraments of the Church. Her palace was well known as a centre of Protestant activity. Ercole was keenly alive to the dangers of the situation, and already in 1540 a breach had taken place between husband and wife because she refused to conform to the practices of his religion, and he had banished her to Consandolo, one of his villas upon the Po. There she continued to shelter heretics, proselytising among the people around. She was solaced by her circle of French attendants and sympathisers. A due affection and confidence united the little band of exiles. But the Duke watched them with suspicion. He was resolved

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to dismiss M. de Pons and his wife on the earliest opportunity. It has been suggested that his prejudice against this pair was caused by the discovery of too warm a feeling on Renata's part for the handsome French cavalier. But it is more likely that it arose from his constant fear of French intrigue. Francis I. did not cease to bring every pressure to bear upon the Duke in order to gain ascendancy over him. Besides underhand methods, he used open flattery and temptation. The hands of the young Princesses of Este were sought for French princes of the blood and the old traditional sympathy between the two States was skilfully played upon. The French Court had already a strong friend in Cardinal Ippolito, upon whom Francis I. had bestowed the Archbishopric of Lyons, besides other sees and numerous abbeys, and who enjoyed the proud position of Protector of France at the Vatican. This prelate was a typical Renaissance prince, an accomplished diplomatist and perfect courtier, inclined to luxury and splendour, and an impassioned lover of letters and the arts, especially of music. He was the creator of the beautiful Villa d'Este at Tivoli.

But the renewed triumph of Charles V. in 1544 and the Peace of Crespy made France once more of little account; and by threatening the Evangelical party gave Ercole an excuse for severity against his wife's friends. The de Pons couple were promptly disgraced and sent back to France, and Renata was left desolate. But if a victim of persecution herself, the Duchess was not guiltless of inflicting it upon others. In 1550 she suddenly drove into ignominy from her Court its most celebrated inmate, Olympia Morata, the companion of the young princesses, who had lived in her intimacy eight years. This young girl, the flower of Ferrarese culture and grace, joined to the richly endowed nature of a child of the

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Renaissance the deep earnestness of the new age. At fourteen she could write and speak Latin with ease. She quickly acquired Greek also, and her knowledge of philosophy and of letters and her rare eloquence astonished all. She became the friend and correspondent of the most learned men of the day. Her grave disposition inclined her to religious thought, and after passing through a phase of scepticism, she adopted the Lutheran opinions, like her father, and engaged herself to a young German physician, Andrea Grüntler, a Lutheran also. The motive of her royal mistress's sudden cruelty to her remains a mystery. Sectarianism was already embittering the reformers; possibly a follower of Calvin could no longer tolerate a Lutheran. A short and tragic career remained for Olympia. She married Grüntler, who carried her away from Ferrara and across the Alps to his cold and still barbarous country, where, parted from her friends and the cultured and sunny atmosphere of Italy, and unable to speak the language of the people round her, she endured the privations and hardships of extreme poverty, consoled only by the love of her husband and by her religion. But the pair were soon involved in the religious wars which desolated Germany. Schweinfurth, where they had settled, was subjected in 1555 to a terrible siege and sack, in which they lost all their possessions and escaped only with their lives. Half-naked and already fevered by want, Olympia reached shelter only to die at the early age of twenty-seven. A few of her writings and some letters to old friends in Italy, in which she describes her sad circumstances and adventures, are still existing, much "touched up," however, by their editor, Curione.

The shadow of religious persecution was indeed darkening over Europe. In Ferrara the Duke, worried by the Holy Office, was compelled again to

bestir himself against heretics, and in 1550 this city of liberal Renaissance traditions was the scene of the second execution for religious opinions recorded to have taken place in Italy, a young Faentine scholar named Fannio being hanged for heresy in spite of all Renata's efforts to save him. A year later a Sicilian priest named Giorgio also suffered death. But the most obstinate root of heresy, the Duchess herself, could not be so summarily extirpated, and the reproaches and exhortations of the spiritual advisers sent to her by Ercole to lead her back to obedience were met with scorn and indignation. She thanked God that she had never done anything for which right-minded people had blamed her. It was better to obey God than man, and the malice of her enemies would fall on their own heads. The Duke was awkwardly placed between Rome and this obstinate lady, whose defiance was prompted by the sense of a great kingdom at her back. In 1552 the French Court succeeded in obtaining a fresh hold over Ercole by stealing from him his heir Don Alfonso. The natural longing of the high-spirited prince to visit the land of military glory and chivalry had been encouraged by his mother and her ladies, who dreamed and talked continually of France, and by great promises secretly made to him by the French King's agents. Going forth one morning ostensibly for the chase with a few attendants, he pricked across the border and started at full speed for France. The Duke was beside himself with rage. With piteous haste he wrote to the Emperor to exculpate himself in the matter, and swore to the Vatican that he would be more severe than an antique Roman towards his disobedient son. The prince was given a command in the French army and fought against Spain in the war of 1553, winning great praise by his gallantry. But



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Ercole succeeded in appeasing the natural ire of the Emperor, and the French again failed in this attempt to force him out of his neutrality.

But Alfonso's rash act hastened a catastrophe which had been long preparing in his father's house. The Duke was persuaded that his wife had contrived the young man's escape, and the exasperation already provoked in him by her disregard of his wishes, and above all by the scandal which her doings brought upon his catholic House, came to a climax. In a long and characteristic letter to Henri II. he related his "calamities" which till then he had kept secret from the reverence which he bore to the serene blood of France, telling how he had implored his wife a thousand and a thousand times for the love of God and the repute of his and her posterity to put away these "heretical fantasies," how for many years with infinite pain and the great shame of his House and the discontent of all his subjects he had dissimulated and suffered them as best he could. But now as Mass was no longer heard in his wife's house, and as it appeared to him indecent to leave his daughters of seventeen and fifteen to be brought up in a false religion, which, besides the offence to God, might also cause difficulties in marrying them to Christian princes, and the more so as the rumour of the mother's heresy was already spread throughout Italy, "*con mio gran vituperio*" he had decided to tell her, as gently as he could, that it was his absolute will that his daughters should hear Mass, confess and communicate. But she had defied him and bid her daughters in his very presence not to obey him, but to continue in the way in which they had begun, trying to persuade them that his religion and that of many other princes was not the true one, with so much fervour and arrogance that who so had heard her speak would have judged him much more patient than

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Job in suffering such words, only out of respect for His Majesty.

Ercole had cautiously chosen the right moment for this outbreak. The Court had grown weary of Renata's woes. Francis I. was dead, and Henri II. having secured a much more useful hostage in the young Alfonso d'Este, was willing to abandon his "only aunt" on certain terms. The two sovereigns agreed that should Renata prove deaf to the exhortations of a Jesuit theologian named Obiz, whom the King was to send to her, Ercole might deal with her as he thought fit, and should confiscation of her estates be judged a necessary punishment for her errors, certain territories which formed part of her dowry were to revert to the French King.

Meanwhile the Duchess, aware that trouble was upon her, was fortified in her "necessity" by letters from Calvin, and by the exhortations of a minister whom he despatched to her aid. Ercole discovering this person, no longer delayed to act, but promptly took away the princesses Lucrezia and Leonora from her and placed them in a convent. Though shaken by this step, Renata still firmly refused to renounce her opinions. The persuasions of Obiz proving useless, the Duke resolved to proceed to extremes. He brought her from Consandolo to Ferrara, and she was arraigned for heresy, with twenty-four of her household, and was tried by the Bishop and Inquisitor of Ferrara and other ecclesiastics on charges of professing the Lutheran heresy, denying the efficacy of the sacraments, making converts and corresponding with heretics. She was declared a heretic, and was condemned to perpetual imprisonment, with confiscation of her property.

Renata met her sentence at first with a royal heart, loudly declaring that all this was done to her because

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her "nephew," Henri II., coveted her possessions, and the Duke, her husband, desired to get rid of her. But God having illuminated her with His holy faith, she hoped that He would also give her patience enough to support all these persecutions. She was imprisoned in the palace, attended by two women only. The whole Court was deeply oppressed by these untoward events and gloom hung over all, while the Duke in his official letters bewailed this "tragedy" in his House, calling his misfortune the most strange accident which had for many centuries befallen a Christian prince.

But Renata was not made of the stuff of martyrs. The loneliness and confinement, the absence of her children and circle of sympathisers broke her spirit. After a few days she yielded to the continual pressure of her husband and his Jesuit priests, confessed and received the Eucharist. She was immediately released, and her daughters were restored to her amid the immense jubilation of the Court.

This sensational "fall" deeply grieved Calvin and the Duchess's Protestant friends. But Olympia Morata, who had proved the inconstant mind of her whilom mistress, whom she pronounced a "testa leggiera," was not surprised when the news reached her in Germany.

It is evident, however, that, despite her recantation, Renata's convictions remained unchanged. She was never properly reconciled with her husband, who continued to complain of her. But she no longer asserted her opinions as before. Her French followers were all dispersed, and those who had not fled from persecution had been driven away by Ercole during her imprisonment. She stood alone, abandoned by her country and destitute of influence. Her career in Ferrara was done. She retired to the palace beside



PALAZZO DI S. FRANCESCO FROM GARDEN.





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San Francesco, and the world heard little more of her for the next few years.

The Duke had been compelled to pardon his son in order to get him back from France, and Alfonso returned about this time. Ercole was, in fact, inclining to friendship with France, now that he was relieved of the vexatious interference on Renata's account, which he had been so long compelled to endure. In 1555 he abandoned his obstinate neutrality and joined with the new Pope Paul IV. and France in a war against Philip II., with unfortunate results. Paul, defeated and at Alva's mercy, made peace for himself, and left his ally to face the Spaniards alone in Italy. After some reverses, Ercole was enabled by the help of the Medici to secure peace, Philip being anxious to withdraw his forces to the Low Countries. The momentary kindness between the Estensi and Medici, who were generally on terms of hostility, was sealed by a marriage in 1558 between Alfonso and Duke Cosimo's daughter, Lucrezia, an ill-favoured maiden, whom the bridegroom left behind in her father's house immediately after the nuptials, hurrying back to the allurements of France. Here, not long afterwards, he held in his arms the dying King, Henri II., mortally wounded by his adversary in a tournament.

A few months later Duke Ercole died, after a career almost as troubled as his father's, and struggles as unceasing, though less dignified, to defend his independence and prerogatives from the encroachments of the papacy and from foreign interference. But plagued with a contumacious wife and self-willed children, and not free from meanness himself, he makes a somewhat poor figure in history. The scandal which he desired so much to hide in life has pursued his memory relentlessly, and the burning

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passions of the day have transmitted through poetry and romance and biassed narrative the images of him and Renata, painted by Clément Marot long before, as the bigoted tyrannic husband and the suffering martyred wife.



## CHAPTER IX

### *The Fall*

“ . . . Thou, Ferrara, when no longer dwell  
The ducal chiefs within thee, shalt fall down  
And, crumbling piecemeal, view thy hearthless halls,  
A poet's wreath shall be thine only crown ! ”

BYRON.

THE first act of Alfonso II. showed that a ruler of more generous spirit than the last had succeeded to the Dukedom. On the evening of his coronation he released Don Giulio from the obscure chamber where, forgotten by all but the Estensi themselves and a few old men who knew the secrets of the House, he had lain a prisoner fifty-three years. Ercole would never hear of setting his uncles free, but death had liberated Ferrante in 1540. An eye-witness has left a touching description of the old man's return to the upper world, the wonder and joy of the people over him, his desire to recognise the acquaintances of his youth and the spots which he remembered, and how, accompanied by rejoicing throngs, he visited all the monasteries and convents, and was admitted even into those most strictly cloistered, where he kissed the nuns and was kissed by them in return. He was a tall fine man, says the narrator, and rode a horse fit for a young man. The strange dress “*alla borsesca*,” the fashion of a century before, in which he issued from his prison, astounded those who beheld him. Full of plans for the future, he was preparing for a visit to Rome when he was struck down by death, and was carried once



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more to the grave a year and a half after his strange resurrection.

The new Duke had the reputation of a military hero, won in the wars of France, and all his life a passionate enthusiasm for arms and for all chivalrous exercises animated him. His handsome person, dignified presence and gallant bearing endeared him to his people. He was besides a man of strong character and remarkable abilities. But such qualities were little needed now in Italy, where Charles V. had succeeded in imposing peace at last upon the contentious spirit which had vexed her with centuries of warfare. The Treaty of Câteau Cambresis in 1559 fixed the Spanish yoke firmly upon her neck, and the Council of Trent was busy forging chains for her restless mind. Alfonso had to content himself with the semblance of greatness, and to spend his political sagacity, developed to the point of *finesse* in the diplomatic school of la Casa d'Este, on questions of personal dignity. Such was the famous dispute with the Medici on the subject of precedence, started in Ercole II.'s time, and taken up and waged with every legal and diplomatic weapon for years by his son in the Imperial and Papal Courts. The Dukes of Ferrara claimed, on the ground of their ancient blood and sovereignty, to rank above the lately created Dukes of Florence. But the greater power of Duke Cosimo and his friendship with Spain gave him the advantage, and in 1569 Alfonso was finally defeated by the elevation of his rival to the rank of Grand Duke, an advance which by no means could he obtain for himself. The long contention led to some absurd scenes—as, for example, on the occasion of the marriage of Alfonso to the Emperor Ferdinand's daughter, Barbara of Austria, which was to have been celebrated at the same place and time as that of Francesco de'

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Medici, Duke Cosimo's heir, with her sister Giovanna. But such a quarrel took place between the Florentine bridegroom and the excitable young Cardinal Luigi, who was representing his brother Alfonso, and each made such unseemly attempts to forestall the other at the chapel, that the ceremony had to be abandoned and the princesses despatched to their respective destinations and there separately espoused. In 1574 Alfonso tried every diplomatic means to exalt his power and consequence by obtaining the throne of Poland, vacant by the accession of Henri III. to the French crown. But here again he was disappointed and reaped only the derision of Italy. Nevertheless, though he failed to make himself a king and take the *pas* of the descendant of Florentine money-lenders, the grandson of Louis XII. enjoyed a great position in Europe. The prestige of his ancient name, the fame of his capital for learning and polite manners, his elaborate machinery of state and his imposing personality, made him appear much greater than he was, an illusion which he sought to maintain by extravagant pomp and luxury.

Under Alfonso the old glory of the Renaissance revived in Ferrara, but with a difference. A new self-consciousness and sense of sin burdened men's minds, giving a fiercer and more feverish savour to their joys. They abandoned themselves recklessly to pleasure at those moments when the fear of the Inquisition was not on them. Alfonso imported something of the licence of the Court of Henri II. into his own capital, whence the influence which had so long helped to sadden it now withdrew in the person of Renata of France. There was little sympathy between the mother and son. The Duke had no intention of compromising himself with Rome, which still looked askance at the city of so much Protestant notoriety,

by weakness towards heretics, though throughout his reign he maintained the best traditions of his House and showed the independence of a strong man, by resisting the encroachments of the Inquisition in his principality, which suffered far less from persecution than other parts of Italy. Renata, aware that there was no more room for her religious zeal in Ferrara, resolved to abandon her children and return to France, where she hoped to further the Huguenot cause. She quitted the city in 1560. In France, however, she found less consideration and respect than she expected; the Court of Catherine de' Medici was little amenable to her will. She retired to her own castle, and there, as Dame de Montargis, continued to support the Protestants, though she had ties of affection with the opposite party through her eldest daughter Anna, now Duchess of Guise, and one is glad to find her exercising her old spirit in upbraiding Calvin himself for his narrowness and want of charity towards his enemies, and the lies which he allowed to circulate among the Huguenots about her murdered son-in-law Guise.

With the disappearance of her sombre little figure across the Alps, gravity deserted Ferrara. Her children seem to have inherited little from her save an overweening pride in their royal blood. Alfonso's punctilious observance of religious ordinances was but a politic devotion. Luigi, her younger son, who was made a Cardinal in 1561, and succeeded later to his uncle Ippolito's benefices and honours in France, showed even less of Renata's piety. He had struggled hard to reject the ecclesiastical habit which his family had forced upon him for political and worldly reasons, and never was there so vain and dissipated a prelate. His extravagance and luxury passed the bounds of reason. As for the daughters who had grown up at her side, their sober bringing-up had

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probably impelled them in a contrary direction. Lucrezia, at least, was a lady of liveliest temperament, insatiable in her appetite for pleasure and excitement. She had fine talents and a vivacious wit, and had been very highly educated ; in artistic and literary matters her taste was excellent, and she was a generous patron of poets and scholars. No learned stranger arrived in Ferrara, we are told, but she called him to her in order to hear him discourse and dispute with other scholars. She it was, rather than Leonora, who protected the young Tasso in his first years at Ferrara. Her marriage with Francesco Maria Rovere, Duke of Urbino, arranged in 1570 by her brother, when she was already thirty-five, turned out disastrously. Her twenty-year-old husband loathed the union, and his unkindness and neglect drove her from him back to Alfonso's Court, where she spent most of her life and consoled herself with amorous intrigues. The younger sister, Leonora, was too sickly to take much part at Court. Over her pale withdrawn figure legend has cast a halo of romance. She is represented as the incarnation of noble culture and piety, the exalted object of a great poet's passion. But modern research has revealed her true character, and she is known now to have been a woman of mediocre abilities and prosaic mind, with some talent for business, but with none of the interest in art or poetry which dignified a true princess of that age.

Renata's own place as Duchess was filled first by Lucrezia de' Medici, who, however, died in 1561, poisoned, according to some writers, by her husband, for her infidelity. But though her family was not distinguished by virtue, and Alfonso was a sixteenth-century prince capable of avenging an affront to his honour in terrible fashion, the story is doubtful. Her successor, the devout and amiable Barbara of Austria, died also, after a few years, in 1572.



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Seven years later the Duke, now forty - five, married Margherita Gonzaga, daughter of the Duke of Mantua, a beautiful and lively maiden of sixteen, who threw herself with eagerness into all the diversions of the Court, where the revelry was growing ever louder and more unrestrained in the shadow of the doom which by that time was creeping relentlessly over it.

Besides the princes of his own family, his uncles, Don Francesco and Don Alfonso, with their children, and others less closely related, an aristocracy as illustrious as any in Italy surrounded the Duke: the Bentivogli, sprung according to tradition from the love of the captive King Enzo for a Bolognese maiden in the thirteenth century, and once themselves sovereigns of Bologna; the Varani, who had ruled Camerini till expelled by Cesar Borgia; the Contrari, descended from the great Uguccione of Niccolò III.'s time; the Trotti, powerful ministers of la Casa d'Este for generations; the Costabili, Calcagnini, Romei, Ariosti, Guarini, Bendidei, and many others, all known in Italian history. These nobles vied with their lord in excessive luxury. They disdained every calling but that of a cavalier, and lived in idleness upon the revenues of their estates, which they squandered on pompous retinues, on horses and carriages, costly dress and endless feasting, gaming and jousting. They were renowned for equestrian skill. Orazio della Rena, a Florentine envoy at the Court, gives a somewhat caustic report of their vanity and love of ostentation, their elaborately ceremonious manners, and their rooted belief in the superiority of their sovereign, their city, their wine and produce to any other in the world. The desire to please the Duke was an extra spur to their extravagance. It was Alfonso's aim to dazzle his foreign guests by his magnificence, and when any

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distinguished visitor arrived, woe to the cavalier who failed to appear in his most gorgeous array, or the Court lady who was not present in her finest carriage in the procession to the evening banquet at the Montagnone or the Rotonda.

So splendid was the Court of Alfonso that it resembled, as Annibale Romei, a Ferrarese gentleman, has recorded in his Discourses, rather a "grand regal court than the court of a grand duke," and this, according to the same writer, was because not only was it full of the most noble lords and valorous cavaliers, but was the resort of the most learned and refined spirits, and of the most excellent men of any profession. Names of lasting celebrity glorify it. Battista Guarini, who crowns with his *Pastor Fido* the high literary repute of Guarino da Verona's posterity, greater still, Tasso, with his *Aminta* and *Gerusalemme*, stand among the immortals, while there were a number of lesser stars who are still remembered; Alberto Lollio and Cinthio, of the older generation; Pigna, the Duke's all-powerful minister, indefatigable in composing sonnets and debating philosophical questions amid the cares of state; his successor, the gifted and crafty Antonio Montecatini; Patricio, Salviati and many others. Alfonso took every pains to attract genius and to revive the somewhat faded literary glory of his city. For his famous ancestral collections of antiquities and medals, to which he largely added, he secured the superintendence of the great antiquaries, Pirro Ligorio and Enea Vico.

The Duke guarded his celebrities jealously, and to serve him was to wear chains, as Tasso found. He issued an order forbidding anyone to take service with another master without his permission, and any that attempted to do so were pursued by his vengeance through every Court and could with difficulty obtain

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patronage. In this sixteenth-century Italy, ruled by Spanish methods and Tridentine decrees, genius had to endure a yoke. Worse than the want of liberty was the soul's bondage, the terror of the Inquisition pulling back the spirit that still desired to soar, the restriction of the mind to prescribed channels of thought, the conventionalising of ideals and sentiments. Their mental activity baulked of its range, the Italians fell back on the joys of the senses. A soft and sensuous tone prevails in the Ferrarese culture of this time. Philosophy dallied with questions of love and courtesy, following on the lines of Castiglione and Bembo. In literature, poetry, artificial in style and imitative of Petrarch, occupied the first place in general favour. Music, which springs in its modern development out of this age of decadence, was cultivated more than ever, in its most seductive forms. Prince and page alike were trained in this art by the best professors, so that Ferrara surpassed every other city in musical reputation. Even the nunneries were centres of music. The Duke kept a number of musicians in his service, who furnished the great concerts for which his Court was renowned. Most of the famous composers and performers of the time served him in their turn. Palestrina himself was his "maestro di cappella" and spent several years in Ferrara, but the severe and original art of the great master did not recommend itself to Alfonso's taste, which the florid style of Alfonso and Francesco, surnamed della Viola, long employed by la Casa d'Este, suited better. The practice of wedding music to poetry had come into fashion, and the madrigals and songs of Guarini, Tasso and Pigna were sung to the melodies of Luzzascho, Fiorini and others. In the apartments of the Duchess and princesses, the grave converse of Madame de Soubise, of Anna de Partenay, of the noble-souled

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Olympia, was replaced by the seductive voices of the sirens who formed Alfonso's celebrated "concert of ladies"; the most famous of whom were Tarquinia Molza, poetess and scholar as well as musician, the Bendidei sisters, Lucrezia and Isabella, wives of Ferrarese nobles, and the fascinating Mantuan, Laura Peperara, the Duchess Margherita's maid of honour. The singing of these ladies was one of the great attractions of the Court, and the report of it spread even beyond the Alps.

The Ferrarese were almost as famous for dancing as for song, and the grace of the women has been recorded by many witnesses. The custom of masquerading lent an extra gaiety and licence to the infinite balls and the other diversions of this city of easy manners. Ferrara was noted for the manufacture of artistic travesties. Her masks were sought by all the fashion of Italy. The privilege of masking depended on the pleasure of the Duke, but Alfonso was very indulgent on this point. During the Carnival, which lasted from the New Year to Lent, and on all public holidays, which were ordained on the least occasion for rejoicing, every person who pretended to consequence went about masked and mingled with the throngs in the streets, indulging in fantastic and often coarse follies. The Duke himself did not disdain to play the buffoon in public, thereby incurring the rebukes of preaching friars. At these times the whole people, following the example of their betters, abandoned themselves to idleness and unrestrained revelry, the Ferrarese being a people "by nature inclined to pleasure."

The theatre was one of Alfonso's favourite diversions. About this time arose the companies of professional comedians, who travelled from Court to Court throughout Europe. The Duke was one of the most



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liberal patrons of these "istrioni," and every year they were expected in Ferrara, where, besides farces of clowns and pantaloons, they gave more serious works. Pastoral plays, a form of drama newly invented and perfected in Ferrara by Beccari, Tasso and Guarini, were performed by them before the Court. The princes of Este, who had been trained in childhood to recite Plautus and Terence, often took part themselves in plays with their courtiers. A theatrical flavour, in fact, pervaded the life and pleasures of this society. Artificiality and love of spectacular display invaded even the tournaments and sports of chivalry, and these were arranged on complicated plans, to represent some romantic or allegoric concert devised by a Court poet, and were furnished with elaborate scenery. Knights attacked castles and slew mock giants and dragons in defence of virtue, with accompaniment of music and flames and incantations. These performances mark the complete decline of chivalry, and the false ideals of the age appear in the sentimental motives and conventional praises of chastity and courage, so contradictory to the real manners of society, in which the general decadence was very apparent. There was much religious fervour, but of a hectic kind, mingled with mysticism and superstition. The city was corrupt through and through. No moral law was regarded except that of honour, offences to which were visited by lawless revenge. A typical case was the murder of Anna Guarini, daughter of the poet, by her husband, Count Ercole Trotti, for a supposed intrigue with another nobleman. A vendetta more sensational still, because of its mysterious manner and its connection with the reigning House, was the removal of the Marchese Ercole Contrari. This noble had dared to love a princess of Este. The intrigue between him and the Duchess of Urbino was

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attracting notice and compromising the honour of her House. The Duke judged it necessary to interfere, but a public scandal was to be avoided. One day the Marchese was invited to the palace, and all unsuspecting was led by the Duke himself into a chamber where three or four other noblemen were present, as well as a worthy of more sinister sort—"il cavaliere della corda." Alfonso engaged his victim in friendly conversation. Suddenly one of the gentlemen threw a hood over the Marchese's head, and, while another held him fast by the arms, the executioner slipped a noose round his neck and strangled him. The dead man, the last of his famous line, was carried back to his palace, and the world was bidden to believe that he had died of apoplexy. But the truth could not be concealed, and the crime did not fail to bring its revenge upon the race of Este.

Ferrara, in carrying pleasure to the point where tragedy must needs meet it, did but fulfil the spirit of the age. Her very excesses made her a Paradise of the reckless and gay. The young prince of Mantua, Vincenzo Gonzaga, could scarcely be torn from the delights of his brother-in-law's Court. More ceremonious guests, archdukes from Germany, the French King, Henri III. in 1574, paused willingly here when passing through Italy, and were entertained with a thousand delights. Another guest of still rarer kind entered in 1569 into this city of so much enchantment for a romantic and excited spirit, the young Torquato Tasso. Soon after his arrival the Duke's second marriage was celebrated, and among other festivities, a great allegorical tourney, entitled the Temple of Love, was held. The poet describes the impressions made upon him by his surroundings. "It seemed to me that the whole city was a marvellous painted and luminous scene, such as was never seen

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before, and full of a thousand forms and a thousand appearances, and its doings at that time similar to those which are represented in the theatres with various tongues and various interlocutors. And it did not suffice me to have become a spectator, but I longed to be one of those who were a part of the comedy and to mingle with the rest."

Tasso had been given a post in Cardinal Luigi's household. He already knew Ferrara, having come there earlier with his father, Bernardo Tasso, that pathetic figure of impoverished poet and courtier, who, with the marvellous boy soaring up in precocious growth beside him, had passed from city to city, seeking the only service he understood, that of princes. Torquato was born and bred a courtier. The luxury of palaces, the favour of the great, were necessities to him. No House could offer him so sympathetic a patronage as that of Este, in the sunshine of which so much genius had flowered; no surroundings could be so stimulating to his sensuous, mystic temperament as the music and love-saturated atmosphere of this Court of Ferrara. He threw himself into all its joys, as he had desired to do, only to become the most striking illustration of their vanity, and to learn, as he tells us long after in the words of Petrarch:

"Che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno."

Though but twenty-five, Tasso had published his *Rinaldo*, and already his morbidly active brain, moved by the religious emotionalism of his temperament, and by the fear of the Turkish advance in Europe, which absorbed every mind at this time, had conceived the plan of his masterpiece, the *Gerusalemme liberata*, that new epic of Christian chivalry, born out of time. During the next few years, encouraged by the poetic

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influences of his new home, he continued and finished this, the second great world poem produced in Ferrara within the space of sixty years. With this supreme offering laid at its feet by Tasso, the glory of la Casa d'Este as the protector of genius is complete. Its work for art and literature was finished. The world was no longer to look for inspiration to Ferrara, or elsewhere in Italy.

Tragic after days shadow the lustre which the connection with Tasso sheds on that House. And there was much already to cloud its feverish brilliance. The great fabric was grown rotten. Its swollen splendour was utterly exhausting the State by which it was sustained. To maintain his disproportionate pomp and luxury, Alfonso doubled the cruel imposts already laid upon the people. To paralysing taxation was joined the oppression of an utterly corrupt government. The Duke took no heed of its shameful abuses. Justice was incredibly venal. Ministers grew rich by barefaced extortion. The customs were farmed out, often to Jews, the helpless people were robbed, unchecked, and the peasants were compelled besides to spend their own labour and that of their beasts upon the Duke's public and private works. The prodigality of the nobles, who exhausted their estates and overwhelmed themselves in debt, helped the general ruin. Jews swarmed in the State. In Ferrara alone there were about 6000.

Nor within la Casa d'Este itself was all well. Alfonso II. was not spared the penalty of greatness—discontented kindred—though now, instead of open revolt, it worked by treachery and intrigue. The disunion of Ercole and Renata reflected itself in their children. Alfonso quarrelled with his sister Anna over the inheritance of their mother's estates. The restless and discontented Luigi was continually annoy-



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ing the Duke, very often out of pure malice. The dispute between them divided the family, Leonora always siding with her younger brother. Lucrezia, whose light conduct was an additional vexation to Alfonso, did not scruple to betray the family interests later as a revenge for the murder of her lover. Over the whole House of Este the shadow of coming misfortune was gathering. Alfonso had no child, and the efforts of Luigi to "scardinalarsi" and free himself of his ecclesiastical disability so that he might marry and raise up an heir were in vain. The Council of Trent had drawn the bonds of priesthood closer, and the worldly interests of the Vatican were against him. For, failing heirs of Alfonso and his brother, the male line of Ercole II., to which the succession had been limited by the agreement with Paul III. in 1539, would be extinct, and the fief would revert to the Church. Haunted by this possibility, the Duke did not cease to use every means to get the investiture of the Duchy extended to his uncle, Don Alfonso, and to that prince's sons. But his efforts seemed doomed to failure.

In 1570 a heavy affliction came to hasten the decay which already threatened Ferrara. A succession of earthquakes shook the city almost into ruins. The Duke and Duchess, with the nobles and the whole population, were compelled to herd miserably under tents in the streets and gardens throughout the winter. The shocks continued with lessening violence for a year and a half, but after some months the citizens ventured back to their homes, the buildings were repaired, and the Duke did his utmost to conceal the damage from a world too ready to gloat over his misfortunes.

The years that follow this time in Ferrara are made memorable by the presence there of Tasso, and the appearance of that tragic weakness in him, which makes

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him so fitly the singer of the swan song of that doomed society. The poet had abandoned the Cardinal's service and had entered the household of the Duke himself, who gave him a liberal provision and asked nothing else of him but to sing the praises of la Casa d'Este. It is well to remember Alfonso's generosity at this time to Tasso, who records it many times with gratitude in his writings. The young poet basked in a favour which made him the envy of his fellows. Attractive in person, perfect in courtly grace, an incomparable composer of sonnets and madrigals, he was sought out and esteemed by all. The noblest ladies coveted the homage of his muse. The princesses Lucrezia and Leonora called him constantly into their company and rewarded with their bounty the verses in which he celebrated their names. In these he spoke only the conventional language of gallantry, and the stories of his love for one and the other are unfounded. Both were many years older than he. Nor was Tasso the man to risk such ambitious aspirations. Though quick and violent, his passions were not deep enough for audacity. His heart was light and inconstant. Already in his youth it had been occupied for a brief moment by the beautiful maids of honour, Lucrezia Bendidio and Laura Peperara, in turn. But, the favourites of princes, both were beyond his reach. He relieved his soul by addressing to each an exquisite series of songs in the style of Petrarch. Love was but one element of the poetry which was his whole being, a bird of passage which alighted to sing and soon sped to another bough.

"Pure non fermai giammai la stabil cura  
In saldo oggetto, ed incostante amori  
Furo i miei sempre e non cocenti ardori."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Yet never did I fix a stable mind in steadfast object, and inconstant loves were ever mine, not burning ardours."

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All the beauties of Ferrara shared his adoration. The famous Barbara San Severino, Comtessa di Sala, who for several years graced the Court with her charms and high spirits; her step-daughter, Leonora San Vitale, Comtessa di Scandiana; Marfisa d'Este, gayest and most conspicuous figure in the riot of pleasure in which the Ferrarese Court finished its course; her sister Bradamante, and a host besides are celebrated in his abundant verses, wherein the whole life of that vanished society, its laughter and languors, its joys and artificialities, its hidden bitterness, exist for us still.

But though fortune smiled on him, Tasso was not happy. The serpent lurking in this paradise was ever present to his morbid imagination. His mind was, in fact, overstrained. Not only was he occupied with his great poem, but at the same time he was now debating philosophical subtleties in the various academies, now sustaining an inordinate number of "amorous conclusions" before the Duke and the Court, or reasoning on the same eternal theme at the feet of princesses, while ever pouring forth a stream of song. Such feverish activity could only work its own ruin.

The mental affliction which came upon this great poet and his long imprisonment in a madhouse have given rise to a celebrated legend. His misfortunes were attributed in biography and romance to a hopeless passion for the princess Leonora. This idea seems to have been hit on first in France or England to account for the strange weakness of so glorious an intellect. But it was in Italy that the legend took definite shape, growing rapidly into a detailed story, in which the truth was soon obscured by imaginary additions. The insanity, never doubted while Tasso lived, was now interpreted as merely natural melancholy, intensified by love, and he was supposed to have feigned madness to hide his passion from the Duke, or,

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according to another version, to have been compelled to feign it by the angry Duke on the discovery of his relations with Leonora. In Ferrara itself, home of romance, the story was enriched with thrilling details. The mature princess figured as a young maiden, listening with trembling emotion to the over glowing stanzas read by the enraptured poet at her feet. An unexpected encounter between the lovers alone, a stolen kiss, a dramatic interruption by the Duke, the slaying of a treacherous friend by Tasso as he left the palace, were represented as leading to the catastrophe of St. Anna. Throughout Italy, in the bosky depths of palace gardens, on fountained terraces beneath the stars, on the languorous waters of the Po or the lagoons of Venice, the tale was repeated a thousand times in song and narrative. Novelists and playwrights seized upon it. Goethe has made of it an immortal drama, and already it had become one of those famous romances which are associated with the name of Ferrara, and invest her ancient castle with an almost melodramatic atmosphere of mystery and passion.

It is now known, however, that the tragedy of this supposed victim of love and tyranny was in reality caused by an overwrought brain. Restlessness, unreasonable discontent with the treatment given him, distrust of friends, strange delusions, had long troubled him. His morbid condition was aggravated by a sense of bondage in the Duke's service; the difficulty of quitting the Court vexed his vagrant and uneasy spirit and urged him continually to offend and break away. Then he found himself entangled in the thousand intrigues of a sixteenth-century Court, complicated by the secret jealousies which his success awoke. A courtier, favoured as he was, needed a cool and steady head. Torquato, resentful, weak and vain to excess at his sanest, rushed instead into continual quarrels and



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was easily driven into grave indiscretions. But it was the stifling effect of the religious tyranny then spreading itself over Italy which worked most disaster to his mind. The last child of the Renaissance became a sacrifice to the new movement of intolerance and persecution. The struggle of his free intelligence and sensuous nature with the scruples of a morbid conscience, the fear of falling into heresy, of offending the Inquisition, tortured him into frenzy. His trouble was increased, after the completion of the *Gerusalemme*, by the learned friends to whom, in the fashion of the day, he submitted his manuscript for revision and correction, and who burrowed mercilessly in it for offences against doctrine and morality as well as against their pedantic canons of art. Tasso from this time grew rapidly worse. He imagined himself a heretic ; suspicions filled his mind, robbed him of sleep ; he saw around him everywhere enemies who wished to steal his manuscripts and letters, to betray him to the Holy Office, to poison him, to ruin his soul. His temper became uncontrollable. He came to blows with two brothers, Ercole and Maddalò Fucci, one day, and on another occasion, irritated by the presence of a servant while he was talking with the Duchess of Urbino, he attacked him with a knife. Alfonso, who was much concerned at the poet's state, confined him to his rooms in the palace, and ordered the best physicians to treat him. Soon after he carried him in his own company to Belriguardo for change and repose. But Tasso still got worse, and after being committed for a while to the care of the Franciscans in Ferrara, was again shut up in the Castle. Thence, one night in July, he succeeded in stealing forth. Hiding in the tall wheat fields near the city, he watched the searchers galloping along the roads, and, when all was quiet, he made good his escape, and, disguised as a

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peasant, travelled on foot to Sorrento, where his sister Cornelia lived.

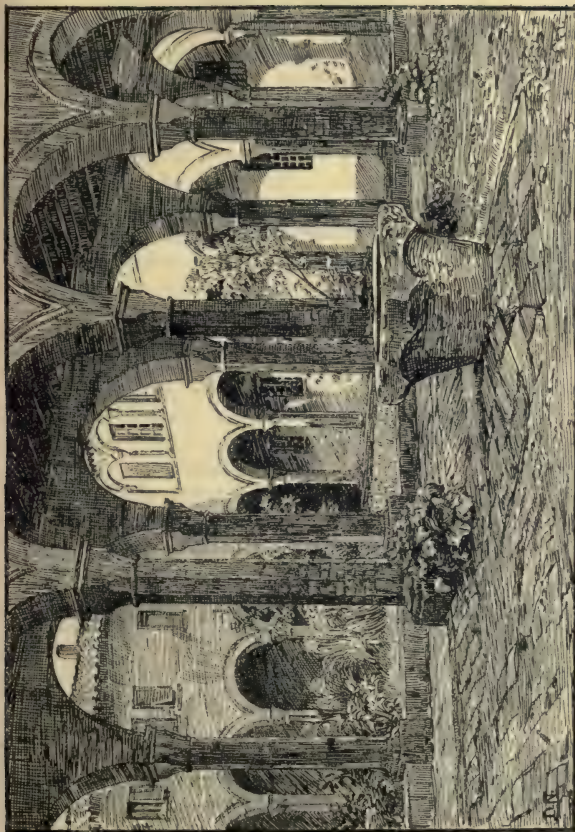
But some fatal allurement drew him back. After wandering miserably awhile, he obtained Alfonso's leave to return, by abject self-abasement. But his offence was not forgotten. The Duke was no longer the same to him. The kindness of compassion, which he now received, so unlike the old honour, was a new affliction to his sick soul. Treated as an imbecile, talked to in signs, he grew more wretched than before, and, persuaded that Alfonso hated him, after a few months he vanished again, flying—as he says himself—“the scorn of a prince and of fortune.”

And again Ferrara drew him to her, as the candle draws the moth. After an absence of some months, the Duke having coldly consented to receive him once more, he left the Court of Savoy, where he had passed some of the interval, and almost regained his health, and in spite of the warnings of his friends, made his way to the fatal city once more. He arrived in an evil hour. The nuptials of Alfonso with Margherita Gonzaga were about to be celebrated with enormous pomp. The whole city was in a turmoil of preparation. Either intentionally, or from pre-occupation, neither the Duke, nor anyone of the Estensi noticed Tasso. No lodging or provision was assigned to him, no heed paid to the verses which he addressed to his patrons. Mortally wounded in his vanity, distraught with the idea that enemies were working his destruction, the unhappy poet roamed about, his misery mocked by the marriage feasts and revelry around him, which continued a whole month. His fury at last came to a head. One day he stormed into the Castle, demanding to see the Duchess. Withheld by her terrified ladies from entering her presence, he broke into wild incoherent prayers to be saved from his enemies, mingled with violent re-

## *The Story of Ferrara*

criminations against the Duke and the whole House of Este. Gentlemen hurried to the scene, the Duke was informed of the affair, and by his orders Tasso was carried to the Hospital of St. Anna and chained as a madman.

Thus began his seven years of captivity. Alfonso d'Este cannot be absolved from cruelty and vindictiveness in this treatment of Tasso, embittered as it was at first by cruel rigour. There is no evidence that the poet was ever confined in the dark cell which is called Tasso's prison and which inspired the indignation of Byron. But the fastidious courtier was treated like the meanest inmate of the hospital, and his delicate sensibilities were sorely afflicted by squalor and discomfort and the want of the luxuries which were necessities to him. Moreover, the consolations of religion which his soul yearned for were withheld from him, as was the custom with the insane. Most of all he suffered from the solitude, his "cruel and natural enemy." Yet there is some excuse for Alfonso. Tasso was undoubtedly partially mad. His illness would not yield to the science of the day, which had worse than no means of ministering to a mind diseased. In his accesses of fury he was dangerous, and even in calmer moments was so excited that, had he been allowed to wander, he must have fallen a prey to someone greedy to exploit his genius. This rare singing bird was coveted by every prince in Europe. Queen Elizabeth wrote that as Alexander had envied Achilles because he had Homer to proclaim his deeds, so she envied the Duke of Ferrara this poet who had immortalised him. Strangely enough, Tasso's madness hardly touched his poetic faculty; he still sang sweetly in his distress, as one may hear many a nightingale do in Ferrara nowadays out of a cage against a window bar.



CORTILE OF THE HOSPITAL OF ST. ANNA.

2  
 Argistoline 1712  
 241  
 1712  
 1712





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It was not for long, however, that he had to endure actual hardships. Proper furniture and food was allowed him after a time, his books and possessions were restored, and he might receive whom he would. Giulio Mosti, whose uncle Agostino, was Priore of St. Anna and according to Tasso, a harsh gaoler, did his utmost to alleviate the captive's lot. The princesses and Court ladies visited and consoled him, and he was occasionally allowed to spend a few hours out of his prison with his friends. But the confinement was a continual torture to him and aggravated his illness; he was disturbed by evil dreams and hallucinations, and believed that demons visited him. His ceaseless letters, praying for the help of patrons and friends to obtain his release, are very pitiful. He had to suffer the additional grief of seeing his precious poems, copies of which were in many hands, ruthlessly pirated. No sooner was he imprisoned than the *Gerusalemme*, still awaiting final revision, was printed from an incorrect and fragmentary manuscript. His friends made this an excuse for bringing out correct versions. No less than eight editions appeared in the first year of its publication, the poem meeting with extraordinary success. His other works were also published. But though the editors reaped great sums, hardly a crown rewarded the author for the labour of his brain. The story of Tasso's literary "assassination" is a cruel chapter in the history of sixteenth-century letters.

At last in 1586 he regained his freedom through the intervention of the Prince of Mantua. He quitted St. Anna, and bade farewell for ever to the city of his glory and his anguish. Yet it was not till nine years later, when he was laid in his tomb in the church of St. Onofrio upon the Gianiculum that his tormented spirit found peace. His last thoughts had turned to

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the Estensi and to Ferrara, and in a letter written just before his death he acknowledged his errors and sought Alfonso's pardon and grace.

The city, loved by Tasso in spite of his sorrow there, was now fast approaching the moment of her own tragedy. Cardinal Luigi was dead. Alfonso, the last of his line, was growing old. All the diplomatic skill and subtlety of Duke and ministers had failed to induce successive Popes to set aside, in favour of la Casa d'Este, the Bull of Pius V. of 1567, which forbade the fresh concession of any papal fief upon the extinction of the direct line, and to settle the succession to the Duchy upon Don Cesare, son of Alfonso d'Este. Once success was snatched from the Duke just as it was within his grasp. Gregory XIV. was favourable to his suit, but died as he was about to promulgate a Bull nominating Cesare to be the next Duke. The election of Clement VIII. in 1591, who, as Cardinal, had obstinately opposed any concession, quenched the hopes of the Estensi. Fortune had turned her back on this long-favoured House.

And in the moment of its need it found no faith or friend. The nobles upon whom it had heaped honours and riches were ready to abandon it. Treachery and ingratitude lurked beneath the servile adulation with which Alfonso was surrounded. The fair ladies and gallant courtiers, who laughed and danced and sang in his palace, were busy intriguing for their own advantage against the House which had sheltered them. Antonio Montecatini, the trusted minister, sent to press the Duke's cause at Rome, secretly betrayed it; and Lucrezia d'Este herself treated with the Vatican for the ruin of her family, and made her apartments a centre of disaffection in the city.

Nor could la Casa d'Este turn any more for help to

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the love of the people. Cruel wrongs had turned their old joy in their splendid prince into sullen hatred. The gulf between sovereign and subjects widened as the Duke, embittered by disappointments, grew sombre and selfish in his old age. Caring only to wring all the revenue he could out of the dominions slipping from the grasp of his House, he allowed abuses to multiply unchecked. The poor were ground down by ever-increasing exactions. The terrible harshness of the game laws, which Alfonso instituted to satisfy his measureless appetite for the chase, was ruining the land. Wild creatures multiplied and consumed the harvests, wolves infested the fields, fertile stretches became wastes, while peasants hung in bunches on the Piazza, with the pheasants they had stolen suspended to their feet. No wonder the people regarded with delight the prospect of a change of government. All sympathy between them and their old lords was dead.

In his later years the Duke withdrew himself more and more from the vulgar gaze, and, surrounded by his courtiers, abandoned himself to a forced gaiety, close hidden within the ducal gardens and wildernesses, where no unprivileged eye might penetrate. There the pleasures of that elect circle grew ever more unrestrained. The joyous, vigorous madcap Marfisa, now wife of the Marchese Cybo Alderano, led the revels, presiding over them like some Mænad with her flushed cheeks and unveiled golden hair, which Tasso had once sung. Alfonso had linked together the scattered pleasaunces round the city by a wide "viale" some miles in length, which made a girdle of beauty and delight within the formidable circuit of the walls, with their mighty bastions and earthworks. Luxury and pleasure girt round by a warlike strength unequalled in Italy, such was the Ferrara of Alfonso



II. The ducal alley was hedged by a thick pleached growth of vines and olives, and along the middle ran a clear stream, so that the prince and his guests could pass as they would, in boats or in carriages, from one place of delight to another, uninterrupted by the curious crowd, the roads leading out of the city being carried over it on bridges. From the Castle, which stood itself amid gardens, and had on the north side the famous "Padiglione," with its plots of rare fruit trees, its rose hedges and pergolas of vines, surrounding a marble pavilion, the Viale led southwards by groves of plane trees and pomegranate-covered walls to the Castellina with its marble chambers and sculptured baths. Then through orchards, shut in by thickets of roses, it passed on beside a little hill of box trees and a garden full of exquisite flowers to a thick ilex wood, where birds of rare kinds were gathered together to make sport for the fowler. Thence to a grove of precious fruit trees—oranges, citrons and lemons—seldom seen in that part of Italy, and enclosed on one side by the city walls, and on another by marble loggias, frescoed and sculptured by the best masters. A flight of marble steps descended here to a large fish pond, where the Duchess, with her ladies and cavaliers, delighted to lean over the parapet and feed the fish, which had learned to glide close to the surface of the water at the sound of a little bell.

The Viale, turning northwards, now led past the gate of S. Benedetto, and all along the western walls, till it reached the palace of Belfiore, rich in memories of Leonello and Borso, and its famous groves, vineyards and fish ponds. These gardens were prolonged past the Porta degli Angeli, used only by the Estensi and their guests, to the Barchetto, a park full of deer and other graceful creatures that fed willingly from the hand. Further east, the Montagnola was reached,

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an artificial hill whence water was made to spring and to flow down into terra-cotta conduits, around carefully ordered plots filled with exquisite flowers and fruits, and hedged with thick verdure. Close by was a half subterranean summer palace, the Rotonda, enclosed in orange trees and jasmine and roses; here the Duke and his companions loved to disport themselves during the hot hours of the summer day.

The most beautiful of all, however, was the Montagna di St. Giorgio or the Montagnone, another artificial hill on the eastern walls. Within the vast enclosure of this "delizia" there was a beautiful palace with halls and baths, frescoed by Garofalo and Carpi; fountains, groves within which bewildering labyrinths had been contrived, parterres of flowers, a wonderful grotto adorned with mosaics and gilded arabesques. A long walk bowered in vines led to a great fish pond, and everywhere were hedges of roses, and thickets rich with abundant fruits, while peacocks sunned themselves in the alleys.

The ducal avenue was continued no further, for along the south side of the city, beside the Po, the crowded streets came close down to the fortifications and the places of embarkation. But close outside, on the south-west, embraced within the arms of the river, lay Alfonso's I.'s palace and gardens of Belvedere, which Dosso had decorated with goddesses and loves, and which Ariosto and Tasso had praised. To be compared to Belvedere was the greatest flattery which could be offered to any other villa in Italy. One enthusiastic writer likens it to the terrestrial Paradise.

On the north side of the city stretched the vast Barco of Ercole I. A number of delicious villas and hunting lodges built by the Estensi were scattered along the banks of the Po and all over the country between Ferrara and the sea; Belriguardo,

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Fossadalbero, Copparo, Sabbioncello, Medelana, Consandolo, and many others, as well as lodges beside the famous fishing grounds of Commacchio, and within the great forest of Mesola upon the lido by the sea.

No sign of decay had touched these dwellings of pleasure, which were doomed to be destroyed so soon; all were in perfection when in 1597 Alfonso II., last of the Dukes of Ferrara, died.

The rest of our story is short. Don Cesare, who succeeded to Modena and Reggio, the Imperial fiefs of the family, made a pretence of assuming the Dukedom of Ferrara also. But Rome was inexorable. Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini was sent with a large force to take possession of the city in the name of his uncle, Clement VIII. And within its ancestral capital and girdle of fortifications la Casta d'Este could no longer defend itself. Treachery, weakness, the long gathering revenge of time, had worked its downfall. Its heir dared not even await the enemy. The day before the arrival of the Cardinal, Don Cesare abandoned Ferrara. The thoughtless crowds, preparing to acclaim the usurper, watched with indifference as he drove alone down the Via degli Angeli between the palaces of his nobles, with tears streaming down his cheeks, and passed out through the gate, disappearing for ever from the city of his fathers. The next day Cardinal Aldobrandini marched in and set up the government of the Pope.

So ended the sway of the Estensi in Ferrara. With it her story ends for us. Bereft of her superb sovereigns, so long the mainspring of her life, debased to the position of a provincial city and crushed beneath a rule more corrupt than the old, and more selfish, being alien, while her bright spirit was smothered under the tyranny of the Inquisition and the reign of

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Jesuitism, she sank into a pitiable state of decay. With the rapidity of a dream her beauty faded. Most of her artistic treasures were transferred to Modena, and the rest were stolen by the papal governors and carried away to Rome. The palaces, emptied of their noble inhabitants, most of whom dispersed to other places, grew desolate. Like the poet's garden, when the lady died, the ducal pleasaunces withered as soon as the desire which had created them was gone. Neglected and abandoned, they were soon overgrown by rank weeds and bitter grasses. The flowers died, the pretty birds and beasts vanished, the conduits overflowed and swamped the parterres, and, choked with corruption, presently ceased to flow. In the country round, the many channelled river, no longer checked by the care of its old lords, broke its barriers and spread where it would, and, as time went on, many tracts transformed under the Dukes into fertile fields turned again into morasses. The villas of princes and nobles fell to ruin, and the porticoes and loggias stood like emblems of desolation in the midst of the unwholesome marshes, or were used by the peasants to shelter cattle or grain. Belvedere was utterly destroyed in 1599, with many churches and a whole crowded quarter of the city, to make room for a great fortress which the Pope built to overawe his new subjects. This Fortezza marked a deeper degradation for Ferrara than Niccolò il Zoppo's Castle, and less worthy to survive, it was swept away in 1859, when liberty was at last regained.

One alone of the princely House remained in the city. With the beautiful scenes of her youth decaying around her, Marfisa, the lady of the unveiled golden locks, sat and grew old in her palazzina in the Giovecca. As her efforts to maintain the amorous joys of the past failed, and love and pleasure fell away



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from her advancing years, sad thoughts came over this once joyous reveller. Like a mockery the pagan conceits painted upon her walls looked down upon her as priest and monk hovered around administering the comfort which life could no longer give. W weary and disappointed, she turned to Christ and His Mother and the saints, as her fathers had done before her, and in 1608 this last of the Estensi was borne out of her dwelling and down the long silent street of the Mortara to the church beside the Porta S. Giovanni, and there laid in the care of our Lady of Consolation.

So, like that of her prototype, Phaeton, Ferrara's brilliant course ends suddenly. The vicissitudes she experienced as a papal state, her sufferings during the War of the Spanish Succession and the other European conflicts of the eighteenth century, the brief feverish dream of liberty inspired by the French in 1796, her occupation by their army under Napoleon Buonaparte, do not concern us here. Nor may I do more than allude to her part in the glorious resurgence of Italy in the century just closed, and to the industrial life quickening in her now, evidenced by the factories rising around and the energy with which the great battle against the waters has been resumed in the river plain; and express the hope that she may take the place which her splendid past points out to her, in a still nobler "*Resorgimento*," that of the artistic empire which is Italy's divine right.



# GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF THE ESTENSI.



Albert 'Azzo (*d.* 1097)

Guelfo  
(Founder of the  
House of  
Brunswick)

Folco (*d.* 1128)

3. Obizzo (1119—1193)

Azzo V C. 1150—1160

Azzolino (*d.* 1212)

Aldobrandino (*d.* 1215)

B. Beatrice I.

Azzo Novello (*d.* 1264)

B. Beatrice II.

Rinaldo  
*m.* Adelsia da Romana

Obizzo (*d.* 1293)  
*m.* (1) Giacomina de' Fieschi  
(2) Costanza della Scala

Azzo VIII

Aldobrandino

Francesco

Fresco

Rinaldo  
*d.* 1335

Niccolò I.

*d.* 1344

*m.* Beatrice  
Gonzaga

Obizzo

*d.* 1352

*m.* (1) Giacomina de' Pepoli  
(2) Lippa degli Ariosti

Azzo

Bertoldo

Francesco

Azzo X

Aldobrandino

1335—1361

*m.* Beatrice da Camino

Ugo

1344—1370

Niccolò II.

1338—1388

*m.* Verde della Scala

Alberto V

1347—1393

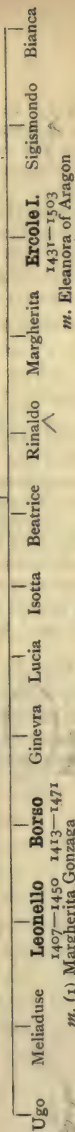
*m.* Giovanna de' Roberti

Obizzo

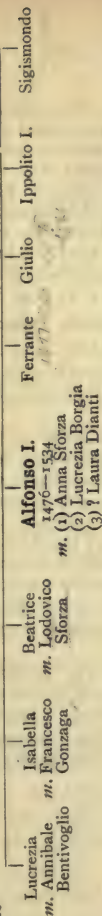
# **Niccolò III.**

1383—1441

- m.* (1) Gigliola da Carrara
- (2) Parisina Malatesta
- (3) Ricciarda da Saluzzo



Niccolò



**Ercole II.**

1508—1559

*m.* Renata of France

**Ippolito II.**

Francesco

Alfonso

Bradamante

Marfisa

Alfonsino

Cesare

Anna

*m.* Francis of Lorraine

**Alfonso II.**

1533—1597

- m.* (1) Lucrezia de' Medici
- (2) Barbara of Austria
- (3) Margherita Gonzaga

Lucrezia

*m.* Francesco Maria della Rovere

Leonora

Luigi

*For Notes see next Page.*



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**ARMS OF THE ESTENSI.**—The original device of the House of Este was a White Eagle, upon a field of blue, the colour adopted by the Guelf party in contradistinction to the red of the Ghibellines. In 1431 Charles VII. of France granted Niccolò III. the privilege of quartering the Fleur-de-lys. After 1452, when Borso obtained from the Emperor Frederick III. the right to add the double-headed Eagle, the Imperial emblem and the French lilies occupy the quarters of the shield, with the White Eagle in the centre. The final honour of emblazoning the Papal Keys was granted to Ercole I. by Pope Sixtus in 1471.

Devices used by some of the Princes, and often met with in the decorative art of Ferrara :—

*Leonello.*—A Sail, a Daisy, a Lion, a Lynx, a Vase filled with Olive Branches, and with a broken Anchor hanging to one of the handles.

*Borso.*—A Unicorn, sometimes seated, sometimes standing, on a palisade fixed across running water, into which it is dipping its horn, in accordance with the medieval superstition that the unicorn had the gift of purifying water in this way. The *Paraduro*, a palisade across a stream, with a gourd attached to it, which rises and falls with the water. The word *Fido* is inscribed above. An open Vase, containing water, on which floats an object variously interpreted as a ring, a compass, or an emblem of baptism. The *Steccata*, a palisade over which appear the rays of the sun. These emblems were often used by Ercole I. also.

*Ercole I.*—A Diamond. The Columns of Hercules.

*Alfonso I.*—A Grenade, with flames bursting from it on three sides. Adopted by this Prince after the Battle of Ravenna, where his guns, by assaulting the enemy suddenly on three sides, decided the victory. The motto, "*Loco et tempore*," was suggested by Ariosto.

## CHAPTER X

### *The Old City*

THE three centuries that have passed over the Ferrara of the last chapter have wrought many changes in her aspect. Her girdle of incomparable gardens has vanished, the dreaming river upon which the gilded bucentaurs bearing queens and princesses used to glide has been transformed into a dull canal. Avenues of chestnut trees and bare stretches of grass grow where once lay the marvellous pleasaunces of the Dukes, with their groves of myrtle and citron, their fish ponds, and summer houses and grottoes. But once under the shadow of the Castle, whence in one direction you descry the graceful brick and marble buildings and colonnades of the Piazza closed in by the old Clock Tower, and in the other the long stately streets of the Addizione Erculea, bordered by palaces and gardens, you recognise the Ferrara of the Estensi, robbed of her splendour but still wearing an inextinguishable distinction, an air of faded nobility even in decay. The very aloofness from modern life gives her dignity. She is the "lady city" still, who gave herself to one of the most stately of all princely houses, and to this day wears its undying mark.

Ferrara is divided into two by the broad line of the Via Giovecca, continued in the Viale Cavour. The southern and more ancient half is a labyrinth of narrow streets and close-packed dwellings, where walls and ways have the charming irregularities of places that have grown up slowly and as it were by chance. Yet

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even here the hand of the Renaissance builder has somewhat smoothed out the tangle of medieval alleys, and we find long parallel streets, crossed by a network of ways all leading up to the heart of the city, the market-place beside the Cathedral.

The Duomo is the centre of the old city. A few hundred yards from it rises the Castle, commanding the long streets of the later part. These two buildings dominate Ferrara between them with a significance sharply marked in her story.

Let us look at the older one first. The Cathedral stands back a little upon the Piazza, and the vision of its rich and gracious façade comes upon one with sudden delight. Rising against the sky in three great gabled divisions, its surface of weather-beaten marble crossed by the innumerable fretted shadows of repeated arcades, it gives the idea, as M. Gruyer says, of a vast triptych. It is one of the finest façades in North Italy and almost the first to show the influence of the Gothic style, which is imposed upon its fundamental Romanesque plan with remarkable effect. The Duomo was founded in 1133 by Guglielmo Adelardo, and the first altar was consecrated in 1135, when the episcopal seat was transferred hither from the old Cathedral across the river. Some leonine verses over the great arch of the portal run as follows :

“Anno milleno centeno ter quoque deno  
Quinque super latis struitur domus hec pietatis.”

But the well-known lines in the vulgar tongue, inscribed upon a prophet's scroll in the mosaic decoration, now long vanished, of the interior are more explicit :

“Il mile cinto trempa cinque nato  
Fo qto emplo a Zorzi csecrato  
Fo Nicolao scolptore  
E Gliemo fo lo auctore.”



GREAT DOORWAY OF CATHEDRAL.



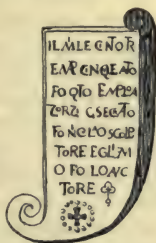


## The Old City

That is, in 1135 this temple came into existence and was consecrated to St. George (Zorzo in Ferrarese). Nicolas was the sculptor, Guglielmo the author. Tradition identifies this Guglielmo with the founder, Guglielmo Adelardo, and it has been suggested that the Guelf chief not only provided the means, but himself designed the building, being, according to a trecento chronicle, very learned in mathematics, architecture, etc. Of Nicolao the "sculptor" nothing is known. He has been thought to be the same as the architect of San Zeno in Verona, also a Nicolao, but only on the ground that the sculptures there resemble those here in style and subject.

The Cathedral was continued by the brother and son—another Guglielmo Adelardo—of the founder.

In 1174 Pope Alexander, passing through the city on the way to his meeting with Barbarossa at Venice, consecrated the high altar in the newly finished choir. The remaining history of the original building must be read in the stones themselves. These tell us plainly that the Adelardi and Nicolao slept in their graves long before it was finished. It is evident that the different stages of the façade represent the changing ideas of a long period. The severely simple Romanesque design, ruled by considerations of ritual and symbolism, was carried out as far as the first arcade, and up to this point the front and the flanks of the building were constructed together. Above this storey the work was discontinued for a time, and when resumed, progressed slowly in the hands of successive builders whose names are unrecorded. The façade, no longer connected in its structural lines with the sides, was continued on a



VERSES FROM MOSAIC  
EXISTING IN OLD IN-  
TERIOR OF DUOMO.

## *The Story of Ferrara*

new plan. Coherence of design was abandoned for the sake of the lately introduced Gothic style. The lateral wings, instead of sloping to the height of the side naves as they usually do in Romanesque churches, have been raised and shaped into gables and match the central one, serving no other purpose than decoration. The arcades as they rise show the gradual advance of the new style. In the second the point is only slight and the moulding simple, but in the third it has completely triumphed, and the multiplied rolls, the rich clusters of slender columns, the deeply-recessed openings, and the trefoil and quatrefoil tracery call to mind our Early English. This part belongs to the end of the thirteenth century, and the façade was completed a little later by the addition of the three gables and the delicate arcading which runs beneath the eaves. The pointed arches and the "oculi" which ornament the first storey, and are so out of keeping with the simple round-headed arcade, must have been added about the same time.

Yet the general effect of the façade is not Gothic. It gives the impression of width rather than height, and the half circle predominates over the point. The builder has but seized the opportunities of the new style to give that effect of lightness which the Italians instinctively sought in the upper portion of a building, and by means of its multiplied curves and elaborate tracery, its patterned play of light and shadow, to impart to the stern Romanesque form the grace and richness which belongs to the artistic temperament of the Ferrarese.

The great projecting portal is the chief decoration of the façade. Here the earliest and later builders meet one another directly. The massive simplicity of the lower part show it to be of Guglielmo and Nicolao's time, while the graceful loggia of the



DETAIL OF FAÇADE OF CATHEDRAL.





## The Old City

Madonna, is a Gothic addition of nearly two centuries later.

Some more leonine verses, inscribed over the doorway, call upon all who come together here through the ages, to commend the "cunning workman," Nicolao, who sculptured it :

"Artificem gnarum qui sculpsit  
hec Nicolaum,

Huc concurrentes laudent per  
secula gentes."

These quaint sculptures are deeply interesting both as decoration and in symbolic import. In the tympanum, upon which the eyes of the people must needs light as they passed under into the church, is carved the typical figure of Christian chivalry, St. George, Protector of Ferrara. Below, on either side of the door, appear the Angel Gabriel and the Virgin, and prophets bearing scrolls from Holy

Writ, to suggest the foundation of that hope with which St. George is armed for his battle with the foe. Then upon the outer pilasters Nicolao has sculptured the whole strange fauna of the mystic medieval imagination, each creature bearing some occult significance difficult now to unfold. Here is a parody of a human being with an enormous face in the midst of its body, and holding a lamb in its arms. Above it a fox in the habit of a monk, with a spelling-book, embodies



SCULPTURE FROM DOORWAY  
OF CATHEDRAL.

a satirical reflection upon the religious orders. Everywhere creatures are preying upon one another and seem to show forth a cynical philosophy of life. The truculent-



SCULPTURE FROM DOORWAY  
OF CATHEDRAL.

looking bird with a knife in its mouth, travestying the dove with the olive branch, recalls the sword too often in the hands of the professors of peace. The great lions of the columns themselves tear the lambs they should protect. These are the writings of the moralist of that day, Nicolao's ironic comment on the manner in which the Church practised its warfare against the Dragon.

The present columns, caryatides and lions are enlarged copies substituted for the originals in a restoration of 1829.

The Madonna of the loggia above, by Cristoforo da Firenze (1427), has a classic dignity, though the figure is somewhat heavy. Her chief

beauty is, however, her position; she seems to watch over the people passing for ever beneath, and the Child looks down, lifting His little hand to bless them. From this sympathetic figure the eye rises to the significant sculptures upon the gable just above, which proclaim the medieval doctrine of the ultimate destinies of man. They date from the beginning of the fourteenth century, if not the last years of the thirteenth century, and are full of the new life which was break-

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ing forth in art at that time. Christ the Judge, and the two angels who attend Him, like great officers of State, bearing the instruments of His triumph, are very dignified figures, and their draperies fall with a freedom and grace remarkable for the period. The beautiful half-length figures in the border—angels whose long, stretched throats are shouting with joy, and prophets playing divers “musicks”—seem to be lifted irresistibly upwards on the breath of their adoration. The procession of the Just and the Unjust, divided in the midst by trumpeting Archangels, is seen below, and the scenes are continued on to the body of the façade where, on the right, Abraham appears seated with a lap full of the crowned heads of the elect, and on the left is figured a hideous monster, half whale, half ship, and devils hurling the condemned into its jaws. Below, the dead are lifting the lids of their tombs and emerging in haste, with their cerements clinging about them. They are full of energy and movement, like the whole of these sculptures, which show, says M. Burckhardt, what the art of this part of the country could attain to, independently of the influence of the Pisani. “With much that is awkward, the heads and the drapery have an energy and a beauty of their own, and the whole work is the result of a single inspiration.”

The varied columns and capitals of the lowest arcade of the façade have the charm of individuality so characteristic of Italian buildings. The architect has not troubled himself about regularity. See how he has squeezed the arches at the ends to allow room for the buttresses. The archaic little Crusader on the buttress of the north end, an image perhaps of the founder knight, Guglielmo Adelardo, is a noteworthy example of a twelfth-century equestrian statue. Nicolao's hand is seen again in the symbolic creatures which decorate the arches of the side doors. The bust of a woman in sixteenth-



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century pseudo-classic style over the right-hand door is somewhat mysterious; whence it came is not known, but the people call it *Madonna Ferrara*, the legendary foundress of the city. The prim figure in pilgrim's dress and hood beside the door is the only statue of an *Estensi* left in Ferrara. It represents the Marquis Alberto after his journey to Rome in 1391. The Bull which he brought back, conferring great benefits on his State, is inscribed at length on the slab to his left. Beside the other door is set a bronze bust of Pope Clement VIII., the usurper of Ferrara, and an inscription recording the virtues of his government.

Within the *loggia* of the *Madonna*, which is accessible by an ancient stair built in the wall of the façade, a wide Romanesque arch is visible in the wall, with an arcade above it, the remains of an older superstructure contemporary with the lower part of the great doorway. Some beautiful and curious ornamentation belonging to this original work is to be seen by ascending to the *loggia*.

The hippogriffs ranged along the pavement once made part of the demolished *Porta de' Mesi*. This door—on the south side of the church—was adorned with bas-reliefs of the Months, six of which are now placed upon the portico on the right hand of the façade. These curious sculptures are of slightly later date than Nicolao's work, but are very primitive in character.

The north flank of the *Duomo* keeps its original Romanesque form unaltered. The arcaded brick wall, ribbed with tall columns, has a gloomy and imposing aspect, to which the strange capitals, formed of grotesque creatures writhing together, give a touch of northern savagery. From a door in its midst, the *Porta di Guidizio*, long bricked up, the dead used to be carried forth to their burial. A churchyard belonging to the ecclesiastical precincts occupied the

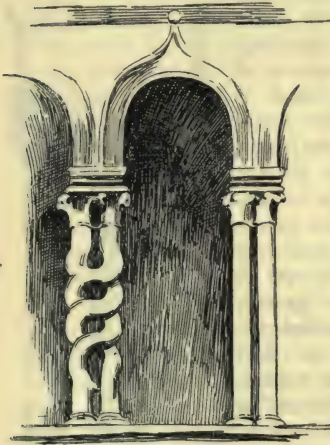
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place of the present Via Gorgadello. The shadow of death seems still to abide upon these grim walls. How strange the contrast with the southern side! Here, above the life and movement of the Piazza, the sunshine falls broadly all day long upon the tiers of delicate arches and serried ranks of columns which stretch down the great length of the building. The architecture here also is of two periods, and the break is sharply marked. The lower part corresponds with the front, and is of brick, except for the marble columns of the arcade. (By a singular whim the builder has made these in pairs half way along, and single for the rest of the way.) The upper gallery, of Verona marble, was added considerably later, and has the effect of a broad ornamental border. The "extraordinary columns" of this arcade are described by Ruskin in his *Seven Lamps of Architecture*. "In the grace and simplicity of its stilted Byzantine curves, I hardly know its equal. Its like, in fancy of column, I certainly do not know, there being hardly two correspondent, and the architect having been ready, as it seems, to adopt ideas and resemblances from any sources whatsoever. The vegetation growing up the two columns is fine, though bizarre; the distorted pillars beside it suggest images of less agreeable character; the serpentine arrangements, founded on the usual Byzantine double knot, are generally graceful; but I was puzzled to account for the excessively ugly



DETAIL FROM SOUTH SIDE  
OF CATHEDRAL.

type" of one of the pillars. "It so happened, fortunately for me, that there had been a fair in Ferrara, and when I had finished my sketch of the pillar, I had to get out of the way of some merchants of miscellaneous wares, who were removing their stall. It had been shaded



DETAIL FROM SOUTH SIDE OF  
CATHEDRAL.

by an awning supported by poles, which, in order that the covering might be raised or lowered according to the height of the sun, were composed of two separate pieces, fitted to each other by a *rack*, in which I beheld the prototype of my ugly pillar." The visitor will easily identify the particular pillar referred to. There is a similar one on the façade.

The fine proportions of the building on this side are lost, as the base is hidden by the picturesque Loggia de'

Mercanti. In the middle are visible the ragged edges of the masonry where the Porta de' Mesi was torn down in the eighteenth century. This door was like the great west portal, but had kept the original Romanesque upper structure. The three disfiguring gables that rise above this side are additions of the eighteenth century, and roof the cupolas of the interior.

The imposing campanile is of pure Renaissance form. It is, however, heavy in effect, and its proportions are wanting in beauty; the arches of the windows are very

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short for the length of the columns that sustain them. It is altogether out of keeping with the light and graceful Gothic work of the Cathedral. But the colour of the red and white marbles with which it is faced is very charming, and harmonises well with the golden hues of the older building. It was begun by Niccolò III., but was not continued beyond the base with the four Evangelic Beasts till Borso's time, whose emblems, the Unicorn and the Paraduro, upon the second storey show how far he carried the work. The third storey was completed by Ercole in 1493; the inscription records his name and that of the Judge of the Savi in office at the time. The chief architect was Pietro Benvenuti, a Florentine, and Meo de' Ceccho, who had worked with Brunellesco on the dome of Florence, assisted him. The top storey was added in 1579 by Aleotti.

The exterior of the Choir, built in 1498, with its pilasters, window ornamentation, and richly moulded cornice, is a good example of the brick building of the Renaissance.

The beautiful twelfth-century interior of the church, with its five aisles, its arches showing just the first trace of the Gothic point, its graceful triforium, has long disappeared, and with it all remembrance of the gorgeous scenes and famous figures which it once enclosed. The first change was made by Ercole I., at whose command Biagio Rossetti rebuilt and enlarged the Choir in 1498 and gave it its present stately Renaissance form. The transepts were pierced at the same time, but the rest was left alone till the city fell into the hands of the Church, after which every successive Cardinal governor impressed his barocco taste upon the building, till in the early part of the eighteenth century the most misguided of all destroyed the whole of the nave and replaced it by the present imitation of St. Peter's in Rome. Of the countless treasures of art



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once in it very few remain. On either side of the west door are frescoes by Garofalo of St. Peter and St. Paul. A little Madonna and Child over the first altar on the south side is by the fifteenth-century Ferrarese, Bonaccorsi, and over the last altar on this side there is a little blackened old Madonna of Byzantine style, traditionally attributed to Gelasio da San Giorgio of the thirteenth century, the first known painter of Ferrara. A Martyrdom of St. Laurence by Guercino hangs in the south transept. The group of five life-size bronze statues of somewhat clumsy proportions in this transept is the work of the Florentine sculptors Niccolò and Gio. Baroncelli, father and son, who together moulded the Christ and the Virgin and St. John, and of Domenico Paris of Padua, to whom with the younger Baroncelli are due St. George and St. Maurelius. They are important as almost the only works of the kind to be seen in Ferrara. The figure of Christ is almost painfully realistic, but the head has beauty and dignity. The rich Renaissance ornamentation upon the armour of St. George should be noticed. The coarsely-modelled terra-cotta busts of Apostles arranged round the transepts are by Alfonso Lombardi. In the first chapel below the transept on the north side there is a fine picture by Francia, the Coronation of the Virgin. One is specially struck by the suave beauty of the St. Catherine and St. Liberata in the group of saints, but the nude Innocent lying foreshortened in the foreground is very disturbing to the general effect. The Virgin and Saints over the third altar is by Garofalo. The hexagonal font, in the last chapel, sculptured with Byzantine designs, and with the emblem of the Cathedral Chapter, the Lamb, is hewn out of a single piece of Verona marble, and is of the eleventh century. A small figure of Christ which once stood upon the cover is now fixed in the wall of the passage leading out from the south transept.



ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON, BY COSIMO TURA (CATHEDRAL).

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Upon the walls of the Choir hang two pictures by Cosimo Tura, some of the finest examples of this master. They were originally painted upon the doors of the old organ and were transferred to canvas in the eighteenth century, when they were most unfortunately "retouched." In their present position they cannot be properly seen owing to want of light, but they were taken down to be cleaned in 1902 and it was then possible to obtain a good view of them. The one on the north wall depicts the old story of St. George and the Dragon with extraordinary fire and earnestness, and with a realistic power such as one has rarely seen in any representation of the subject. It has the significance and impressiveness of an apocalyptic vision. The face and hands of the princess have been grossly repainted, and the grotesque expression given her in the process is a great blot upon the picture. Her head must always have been, however, disproportionately large. The conical hill behind is thought to signify the Church, militant below, triumphant above. The towers that ring it are the twelve Apostles with Judas hanging on the gallows on the left, while the spectators of the conflict in the path below are divided according to their inclinations towards good or evil. The leaves and fruit just above the saint's head may be interpreted as the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The darkness of the hill against the golden sky, the white horse glowing in the evening light, the deep subdued pink of the maiden's robe, the occasional touch of vivid red, make up an exceedingly rich and dramatic effect of colour.

Opposite is the Annunciation. Here the intense quiet is as deeply significant as the energetic action of the other picture. Within a spacious chamber, divided in the midst by a tall pillar, the wonderful event is passing. The motionlessness of the two figures is but



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heightened by the restless movement of the classic forms which decorate the walls. The head of the Virgin has been much spoilt by repainting, and the Angel's has not entirely escaped. But the spiritual emotion which they express still penetrates to us—the awe and submission of the *Ancilla Domini*, the adoration of the messenger, the extraordinary significance of the moment which holds the breath of both suspended. The drapery of the Angel is still disturbed from the rush of his alighting, and the folds have been arrested by the sudden mysterious stillness. The fluttered leaves of her book stay for the moment without falling. This picture is a great example of Tura's genius as a colourist. The whole effect is cool and silvery, and in subtle keeping with the subject. Nothing could be more beautiful than the shell-like colour of the architecture against the profound blue of the sky, the subdued hues of the draperies, the soft bird-like wings of the Angel, the gleam of gold on the walls. The artist's peculiar treatment of drapery is also well shown in it.

The Choir stalls and Episcopal throne are the work of Pietro dalle Lanze and other craftsmen, at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The beautiful intarsia work shows various devices of the Dukes of Ferrara, Ercole's I.'s Diamond, the Grenade of Alfonso I., and also objects of still life, street scenes and landscapes. The throne is adorned with exquisite arabesques, carved by Angelo Luchino and Lodovico da Brescia.

The great fresco of the Last Judgment in the ceiling of the apse is by Sebastiano Filippi, called Bastianino, who has here rashly attempted to imitate Michael Angelo. The coarse, sprawling forms show the complete decadence of Ferrarese painting. Among the damned a woman's figure in the grasp of a demon is the portrait of a certain Livia Graziali who had scorned the addresses of the artist, and the large placid lady



THE ANNUNCIATION, BY COSIMO TURA (CATHEDRAL).

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surveying Livia from her place among the elect is the spouse with whom he consoled himself.

The Chapter is rich in illuminated music books. Among them are fourteen very beautiful volumes miniatured by Ferrarese artists between 1471 and 1535. The earlier ones, which are also the finest, were, some of them, produced for Lorenzo Roverella, Bishop of Ferrara from 1460 to 1474, a warm lover and patron of art whose arms, an eagle and an oak tree, appear in the borders, and others were commanded by his successor, Bartolommeo dalla Rovere, nephew of Sixtus IV. Two of the most beautiful are kept in the Choir. Libro X., an antiphonary of feasts beginning with St. George's Day, is the work of Jacopo Filippi d'Argenta, and was finished before 1501. Page III. shows a beautiful illustration of St. George and the Dragon, and a number of other pages, thirteen in all, are adorned with pictures as exquisitely finished and showing in the drawing and composition and in the delicate and brilliant colour, with its characteristic pink and green, the kinship of the artist with Cosimo Tura and the Ferrarese painters generally. The designs of the borders are full of fancy; the use of animals and birds in them is a distinguishing mark of the Ferrarese miniaturists, and the dolphins, fishes and curled-up flowers that are half shells suggest that the thought of the sea was ever present to these artists born about the brackish "paludi" of the Po. The other book was miniatured by the same artist in collaboration with Fra Evangelista da Reggio, assisted by Andrea delle Veze. The rest of the set, which includes some quite as beautiful as these, as well as eight smaller books, illuminated in 1473-74, may be seen in the Canons' library upstairs.

In a room leading out of the Sacristy there is a fine Madonna and Child by Jacopo della Quercia, and in the



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Choreto is an interesting picture of St. Paul, apparently the portrait of a courtier, and other pictures, by Garofalo. A Madonna, by Panetti, in the Sacristy of the Canons, is a good example of that master, whose characteristically dry manner is redeemed in it by naïveté and devotional feeling.

The Cathedral once possessed many beautiful tapestries and vestments and church furniture of all kinds. Not only the Estensi, but the Pope and Sovereigns of other States when visiting the city and taking part in the gorgeous celebrations in the Church, lavished gifts upon the Chapter. Most of these treasures have vanished ; but there are some fine vestments, and a set of eight beautiful tapestry banners of the sixteenth century which are hung in the nave during the octave of St. George, but at other times are hidden away in an upper chamber where it is difficult to see them properly. The legends of St. George and St. Maurelius are represented on them. The delightfully conventional figures are set in the midst of enchanting landscapes, or against stately architectural backgrounds, and the scenes are framed in wide borders of very rich design. The clear and delicate tones are very delightful. They were worked by the Flemish embroiderer Karcher in 1552, from designs by Garofalo and Girolamo Carpi, and the borders are the work of a Dutchman named Luca.

The cult of St. Maurelius, whose story is depicted on these banners and appears continually in Ferrarese art, is of great antiquity in the city, but it was not till the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that he was exalted to his position beside St. George as "Copro-tettore." His little-known legend relates that he was King of Mesopotamia in the seventh century, but being a Christian, and desiring to devote himself to the service of God, he gave up his kingdom to his

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brother and became a priest. He wandered about, converting the heathen, and after a time was made Bishop of Ferrara. On the first occasion when he celebrated Mass in the Cathedral a hand was seen holding a crown of light over his head and a voice spoke promising him future glory among the angels and protection to the place where he should repose after death. He ruled his flock very wisely and was greatly beloved. But news came that his brother was ruling Mesopotamia very wickedly and persecuting the Christians, and Maurelius started off to set things right in his old kingdom. The wicked king, however, enraged by his remonstrances, put him in prison, tortured him, and finally had him secretly beheaded. But the crime was soon revealed, the king perished miserably, and the body of the martyr was fetched by the sorrowing Ferrarese and buried in great pomp in the Church of St. Giorgio.

The space around the Duomo has always been the centre of life and movement in Ferrara. Here all the most strenuous experiences of the city's early history took place. The bitterest struggles of the thirty years' war of Guelf and Ghibelline were fought out in the Piazza, and this was the scene of the citizens' victory over the Papal governor in 1317, when the Gascons were driven out, after days of fighting, from their position of defence against the Cobblers' benches at the head of the market-place, now occupied by a row of shops. From the palace of the Marquis at the other end Tommaso da Tortona was delivered up to the people, who had already lighted his funeral pyre at the corner of the Via San Romano, on that day when Ferrara rebelled for the last time against her lords. Here, too, the scaffold used to be set up, on which those who had offended la Casa d'Este paid the penalty with their

lives. The Piazza was still more familiar with splendid spectacles and gay festivities than with tragedies. Before the Duomo Azzo VIII., "il più leggiadro tiranno in Lombardia," knelt, with fifty-two nobles behind him, to receive knighthood from Gherardo da Camino, the "buon Gherardo" of the *Purgatorio* (Canto XVI.), in 1294. Here Pope Eugenius passed across from the Palace to the Cathedral on a hanging bridge constructed for him by Niccolò III. to hold the session of the Great Council in 1438. Here Borso was created Duke by Frederick III., and here he used to walk and graciously receive the petitions of his subjects. Here took place the frolics and sports of St. George's Day which Girolamo Savonarola would not join, but instead stole forth from his empty home and set out to perform his great mission in the world. Here Ercole and Eleanora of Aragon sat upon the marble terrace over the newly-built Loggia de' Mercanti and watched the tournaments in honour of their marriage and the people made "saccomano" of the feasts of sugar castles and devices brought out to refresh the guests. This too was the place where the citizens used to discourse and hear the news, and it was thoughts of pacing "fra il Duomo e i miei marchesi" that filled the homesick Ariosto with longing in his exile at Garfagnana. The statues of his marquises are long gone from their columns and the stately historic figures no longer fill the Piazza. But the old setting is left in part and the years have only added a grace to it, ripening the hues of the Verona marble and ruddy brick to a fuller mellowness, and the ranks of fruit and vegetable sellers, seated among their gorgeous heaps of merchandise, beneath orange pavilions, as you may see them on a May morning under a sky of limpid blue, make up so enchanting a scene that one could not desire anything different.

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The picturesque Loggia de' Mercanti was built in 1473, "for the ornamentation of the city of Ferrara," against the Cathedral wall, where long before little shops and booths had begun to cluster. It was originally surmounted by a marble terrace and a balustrade adorned with sculpture by Ambrogio da Milano and other artists. The Palazzo della Ragione opposite occupies the place of an old Gothic building of the early fourteenth century, which had a tower at either end, the Torre de' Ribelli, where the bodies of the executed were exposed, and the Torre dell' Arringa, whence the people were harangued and the ducal decrees were published from a balcony. In 1831 the whole structure, which had become ruinous, was cleared away and replaced by the present pretentious Gothic erection. The Clock Tower at the west end was built in 1602 by Aleotti in the place of the Torre dell' Arringa.

San Romano, at the corner of the Piazza, stands on the site of an ancient church and monastery of Benedictines, which existed from the time when people first began to settle on this side of the river, and which served their needs before the Duomo was built. But already in the thirteenth century the monks no longer inhabited it, and their vacant place was adopted for a time as the office of the Savi, the chief magistrates of the city. The present church dates from the early fifteenth century. Though much restored, the exterior is a charming example of the brick building of North Italy, which has a particularly graceful character in Ferrara, where the "cotta" mouldings used for the ornamentation show in the richness and elegance of the designs the same decorative taste and fancy which is remarkable in all the artistic work of this city. The interior of San Romano has been long secularised and is now an ironmonger's shop; but some years ago traces of painting were noticed under



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the whitewash on the walls, and a very interesting fresco of the fourteenth or early fifteenth century was brought to light—a Coronation of the Virgin. As the proprietor was not able to spare the wall space, he had it boarded up, and it cannot now be seen. He has, however, a photograph of it. It is very probable that the whole of the interior is frescoed in the same way.

A door in the wall beside the church leads into the beautiful cloister of the old convent. Two sides of this are of Romanesque style, and show interesting columns of various forms with capitals finely carved, some with animals and human heads, others with foliage, one with a flowing pattern of vine being specially worth notice. The arcade on the south side is of a later date. The effect of the stone and brick used here together is exceedingly picturesque.

The long, narrow Via San Romano, which threads the most crowded part of the city from the market-place to the Porta Reno is a typical street of old Ferrara, where little is changed since medieval days. The tall, irregular houses stand out upon low porticoes and leave but a narrow strip of sky visible between the long sweep of the roof lines. The houses are of every stature, and the colour, whether of mellow brick or faded pink and yellow stucco, is delightful, with here and there a trail of brilliant green leaf or a patch of scarlet flowers showing through a rusty old iron balcony. Some were once palaces, and show fragments of good brick ornament, and many have richly moulded cornices. Not the least part of the interest of the street is the vivid life which fills it; for Via San Romano is the busiest street in the whole city. Within the deep shadow of the porticoes there is a continual flow of peasant folk from the country outside; women in garments of crimson and purple and orange pass in and out of the little shops set back in



VIA SAN ROMANO.



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the gloom where copper wares and greengrocery shine out with subdued brilliance.

The street is crossed a good way down by the *Via delle Volte*, a wonderful lane of still more ancient aspect, over-arched with a long vista of vaults that carry quaint dwellings across the way. Here, too, the figures that pass beneath the arches, darkly silhouetted against the radiance beyond, or that lean from the windows above, are in keeping with their surroundings. Down just such squalid ways as these princes and knights of old used to ride and dip their gay plumes beneath the overhanging vaults. Now as then the cobble stones receive all the refuse from the houses. If you chance to pass there at Whitsuntide, the *Pasqua delle Rose*, as the people call that festival, it will all be buried under a rain of rose petals, and you are reminded still more vividly of the fifteenth century, that age of roses and filth.

The *Via delle Volte* winds on the left through the oldest part of the city, crossing a labyrinth of streets full of picturesque interest. On the right it leads into the *Via Porta Reno*, another old street with some charming porticoed houses decorated with terra-cotta work. Here is *S. Paolo*, with its tall brick tower, one of the oldest churches in Ferrara, but entirely rebuilt in the eighteenth century. In a wall beyond the façade a beautiful old Romanesque doorway is set up, probably a fragment of the original church.

Passing on up the *Via Porta Reno* you emerge under an archway into the *Piazza del Duomo* again, beside the old palace of the *Estensi*.



## CHAPTER XI

### *The Ducal Palace—Castello Vecchio —The Addizione Erculea*

“O deserta bellezza di Ferrara.”—D’ANNUNZIO.

THE whole stretch of buildings on the west side of the principal street of Ferrara, from the Piazza del Duomo up to and including the Castle, formed the residence of the Dukes. The original Palace of the Estensi, known later as the Corte Vecchia, was at the end facing into the Piazza dell’ Erbe and was built in the twelfth century, at which time the quarter between the Cathedral and Castel Tedaldo was occupied by the partisans of the Marquis, while the Torelli faction had their strongholds around San Pietro. This first Palace underwent many vicissitudes during the Guelf and Ghibelline strife; it was burnt down repeatedly and each time arose again. In 1316 Giotto is said to have decorated it with frescoes, but these must soon have perished, in a fire in 1328. Such accidents became less frequent as the city grew more peaceful and her sovereigns enjoyed a less disputed sway, and their increasing wealth enabled them to extend their Palace till it included the part now occupied by the Municipality. Each prince added to and adorned it. Borso employed Piero della Francesca and other artists to fresco the great hall, but their works have long perished. Ercole I. covered the exterior with paintings, and added loggias,

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porticoes and cortiles. In 1503 he built a marble-pillared loggia along the façade opposite the Episcopal palace, and over this in 1528 arose the first permanent theatre of Ferrara, for which Ariosto furnished the plans and Dosso painted the fixed scene. There the comedies of the poet under his own direction were recited by the young princes and princesses of Este. But loggia and theatre were destroyed in a fire in 1532, a disaster which is said to have caused so much grief to Ariosto, who lay sick at the time, that it hastened his death. The present façade is a restoration of the eighteenth century. The Loggia de' Camerini, which faces on to the Piazzetta della Pace (Piazza Savonarola), was built by Galasso Alghisi for Alfonso II. This is the only part of the Palace that remains unchanged since the ducal days. Fires, earthquakes and modern restorations have combined to wipe out the traces of the splendid Estensi. The ancient Torre di Rigobello which arose at the southern end was struck by lightning in 1536, and seventeen years later collapsed totally, and the little shops, which once encrusted the façade beneath, have been swept away. The "Arch of Triumph" admitting to the ducal Cortile (now Piazza Municipale), the state entrance to the Palace, has been partly filled in, and its terra-cotta ornamentation stripped off. Upon the now vacant columns on either side once stood two famous bronze statues of Niccolò III. and Borso. Niccolò's, which is said to have been the earliest example of a life-sized equestrian statue since the days of Justinian, was the work of Cristoforo da Firenze and Niccolò Baroncelli, the first moulding the figure, the second the horse, on account of which he was always afterwards called Niccolò del Cavallo. It was completed in 1451. The image of Borso, a seated figure, dressed in ducal mantle, as became one whose virtue lay rather in

wisdom than in military achievement, was raised beside it a few years later, the sculptors being Gio. Baroncelli and Domenico Paris of Padua. These statues were dragged down from their places as symbols of tyranny during the Republican fervour excited by the French in 1796, and their fragments went to found French cannon, as Julius II.'s shattered effigy had long before furnished material for Niccolò III.'s gun-making descendant, Alfonso. It was in a chamber in this part of the Palace, close to the statue of Niccolò, and called for that reason "*del cavallo*," that Renata of France was imprisoned.

The Cortile, associated with so much pomp in the past, has fallen to lowly uses. Where Eleanora of Aragon passed in with her train of ladies and pages, her Moorish and Albanian slaves, where her daughters Isabella and Beatrice set forth in gilded coaches on their nuptial journeys, and Lucrezia Borgia entered in all her pride at the very zenith of the Renaissance, where in the fevered days of the decadence a thousand grand and florid figures were ever thronging in and out, hucksters now spread their petty wares and peasant women, with humble kerchiefed heads, jostle one another. The Palace buildings around it have been likewise denuded of grandeur. On the west side, now quite modernised, were situated Alfonso II.'s vast Sala del Pallone, in which tournaments and sports on horseback were held, and the Sala de' Giganti, built for his great concerts. These rooms were destroyed by fire, an element peculiarly hostile apparently to the dwellings of the Estensi. Some Renaissance windows, ornamented with sculptured arabesques, remain on the north side of the court, and here is the ducal chapel built by Ercole I. in 1472, of which the original portal is still left, surmounted, however, by an addition of later date. This chapel, dedicated to the Virgin and

## *The Ducal Palace*

afterwards to St. Maurelius, was once the scene of a beautiful and ornate daily worship, and was served by a choir of chosen singers under a "maestro di cappella" of European fame. After being long disused, it is now undergoing restoration. There is nothing of interest in the interior. The beautiful marble "Scala Grande" which leads up into the Palace is the only fifteenth-century feature of the old building left unspoilt. This was also built in 1472 by Ercole I., whose successor, Alfonso, added the curious domed roof of lead. Seated at the top of this stairway, Duke Ercole was invested by the hand of an English ambassador with the Order of the Garter sent to him by Edward IV. in 1480. On a February day in 1503 Isabella d'Este stood at its foot, surrounded by princesses of her House, to receive Lucrezia Borgia into her father's Palace, and again in 1528 she stood there to welcome, more willingly, Renata of France, the royal bride of Lucrezia's son. But the halls, hung with finest tapestries of gold and silk, into which the nuptial processions ascended, are no longer recognisable. The whole interior of the Palace has been completely modernised and stripped of all its adornments. There are two fine Cinquecento chimney-pieces with sculptured friezes of beautiful design in the chamber of the Syndici and the room adjoining, but these were originally in the Palazzo de' Diamanti. One beautiful thing, however, is to be seen. Through a low door hidden in a passage wall the custode introduces you suddenly into an exquisite little cabinet, a perfect gem of decorative art, the work of scholars of Dosso, probably the Filippi. The walls are entirely covered with paintings on a background of gold. Around the simulated architectural design which forms the framework of the decoration, a profusion of cupids, flowers,



grotesques, birds, vases, candelabra and other objects are wrought into patterns of endless flow and variety. Female figures in classic draperies, with shields and helmets, and some of them very lovely in form and pose, stand within niches. But the most beautiful detail is a small figure of Apollo playing the lyre, over the window, which is considered to be by the hand of Dosso himself. The painting on the ceiling is a vulgar restoration of the Napoleonic era. To what use this sumptuous little chamber was devoted is not known nor in what part of the Palace it was originally situated, for it does not belong to its present place, but has been moved and set up there at some time. Perhaps it was one of the "camerini dorati" of Alfonso I., the rest of which have long vanished. The same Duke's "chambers of alabaster," built over the "Via Coperta" connecting the Palace and the Castle, and so called from the whiteness of the sculptures by Alfonso Lombardi which lined the walls, are also only a memory of the past. The incomparable decoration of one of these rooms has come down to us in the history of art. Ceiling, friezes and cornices were frescoed by Dosso with the deeds of Eneas, Mars and Venus, and upon the walls were a series of Bacchanalian scenes, begun by Gio. Bellini, continued and completed by Titian with three of his greatest masterpieces. These precious works of the Venetian masters have been scattered far and wide. Cardinal Aldobrandini, after taking possession of Ferrara in 1597, removed them secretly to Rome, and by no effort could their rightful owner, the Duke of Modena, recover them. Two have now found their way to England, Bellini's Feast of the Gods, of which Titian painted the background, being at Alnwick Castle, while Titian's Bacchus and Ariadne is one of the chief treasures of the National

## *Castello Vecchio*

Gallery. The two other Titians, the Sacrifice to Venus and the Bacchanale are in Madrid.

The Via Coperta, built by Ercole I. and by which Eleanora of Aragon and her children fled from the Palace to the Castle when Niccolò d'Este attempted to seize the city in 1476, is now converted into a public passage and has no feature of interest.

*Castello Vecchio.* — The Castle of Ferrara is one of the most imposing examples of medieval military architecture left in Italy. The great pile rises out of the midst of a dark basin of water, its four corners guarded by four towers which dominate the low roofs of the city stretching far on all sides. Modern alteration and restoration, constant repairs with new bricks, have modified much of its old character, but even the mild atmosphere of to-day cannot do away with the sensation of terror roused by the massive foundations and those heavy arches beneath which the water of the moat looks so dark and secret. At night by a clear moon the great building is extraordinarily impressive. All petty details are lost, and one is aware only of the mighty mass towering up and casting its shadow upon the water which hides beneath its gentle lapping scenes of so much past agony.

To this rugged and awe-inspiring aspect Castello Vecchio once united all the grace of a Renaissance palace, signs of which it still retains. The frowning machicolations carry light balustrades of stone, and in the place of the battlements with which the towers originally ended delicate balconies surround the turrets. And in the same way the cruel and evil memories associated with the dungeons below change as the eye mounts upwards to thoughts of the brilliant sixteenth-century Court which had its dwelling there. Castello Vecchio is the enduring symbol of the rule of the Estensi, of that beautiful and luxurious existence en-

## *The Story of Ferrara*

nobled by art and poetry which they created for themselves upon a foundation of tyranny and oppression. If the Castle recalls scenes of cruel vengeance and family hatred, it speaks also of splendid hospitality extended to genius of every sort.

“Italy counts no famous name  
Which this House has not called its guest.”

The Castle was built by Niccolò il Zoppo after the revolt of 1383. The plans were made by Bartolino Ploti da Novara, and the builder was Gio. de' Naselli. The turrets which surmount the towers are a late sixteenth-century addition. The walls were originally lower than at present, and were topped with battlements as were also the towers. These defences bristled with guns in Alfonso I.'s time. Though less lofty, the proportions of the fortress must have been much more imposing before the alteration.

At the north-east angle rises the Torre de' Leoni, the largest of the four towers. It wears a more rugged and majestic aspect than the others and has an older history, for there was already a tower standing there in 1383 guarding an ancient gate, the Porta de' Leoni, of the city, which at that time continued no further northwards. The name of tower and gate commemorates the two lions which the hero Azzo Novello brought back from the sack of Frederick II.'s city of Vittoria in 1248, and which were kept in the suburb close by. The Via Borgo de' Leoni still preserves the tradition of their captivity, and the old bas-relief of two lions upon the north side of the tower is, according to immemorial belief, a representation of them.

The Torre de' Leoni is associated with the darker memories of the ducal domination. Beneath it are the

## Castello Vecchio

dungeons celebrated in romance and poetry. Upon its grim walls criminals used to be exposed in iron cages. In such a prison the miserable Gianni suffered



TORRÈ DU LEONI.

for his share in Don Ferrante and Don Giulio's plot in 1506. A fine lady, Madonna Caterina Turca, passing by in her carriage as he hung there, was overturned with her three women, carriage, horses and all, into the moat—which at that time had no parapet—



## *The Story of Ferrara*

the coachman being absorbed in gazing at the spectacle. Originally the moat extended southwards, and was connected with a canal or "*scorsura*," which was fed by the river. The water now flows in and out of it by means of underground conduits.

It was not till the time of Ercole I. that the Castle was used by the Dukes as a residence. This prince made many alterations, and the cable moulding which runs round the base of the building is an ornamentation added by him, as is shown by his emblem, the Diamond, worked repeatedly into it. Where poultry vendors now sit, he laid out the "*Zardin de la fontana*," and on the north side, occupied at present by streets and houses, were his gardens of the *Padiglione*. The apartments to which Alfonso brought his bride Lucrezia Borgia were in the Castle, and from that time it became the most important part of the ducal dwelling. The great earthquake of 1570 damaged the battlements severely, and it was after this that Alfonso II. added the turrets and substituted balconies for the battlements and reduced the stronghold to its present form by the help of the architect Alberto Schiatti. The change marks a new era of peace for Ferrara, but the peace of decline and death. A fortress was not needed for rulers no longer powerful enough to defend themselves. It remained for later generations to deprive the Castle as much as possible of the princely character still left to it.

The two entrances used in the present day are beneath the Tower of Sta. Caterina and the Tower of San Michele respectively. Over the latter portal there is a fresco of the Holy Family, with St. Michael and St. George, by a late sixteenth-century Ferrarese, Domenico Mona; it has been repainted. The imposing gateway of Sta. Caterina, which was restored in the eighteenth century, is guarded by a drawbridge

## *Castello Vecchio*

still in working order. Between the two beams by means of which the bridge is lifted the Sacred Monogram appears upon the wall, suggestively interposed, and reminding the spectator of the gentle spirit of San Bernardino da Siena, who visited Ferrara in 1431, preaching peace, and devotion to the name of Jesus, and whose trace remains in the custom, common still in the city, of setting this sign upon the buildings.

The courtyard has been sadly modernised. The great staircase which could be ascended on horseback no longer exists. Upon the walls the portraits of princes of Este, painted by Carpi and other artists, have decayed away from exposure, and all the frescoes of earlier date have long perished. A naïve and somewhat homely Madonna of the earlier fifteenth century alone remains. The lower half of her figure, with its starred robe and little red shoes, is hidden by the door of the shrine, but la Maddalena, who acts as guide to the Castle, keeps the key and will open it for the curious.

Like the Palace, the Castle has been converted to modern use, and it is vain to try and follow the footsteps of Lucrezia Borgia and her train of poets in the chambers above, or the faint trace of that legendary Eleanora d'Este, whose amour with Tasso is one of the most haunting associations of the Castle. One set of the ducal apartments is however still preserved in the original state. Nor has any reforming hand meddled with the dungeons or wiped out the memories of Ugo and Parisina, of Ferrante and Giulio d'Este which consecrate them. These must be visited first.

In response to your call, the ancient guide hobbles across the court and with a huge key unlocks a door beneath the Torre de' Leoni. Proceeding along a corridor, she reaches a heavy trap door which she lifts

with difficulty, revealing a narrow stairway. Having reached down a lantern and slowly lighted it, and admonished the visitor to be very careful, she descends, a strange bent figure looming black against the ray from her lantern, and you follow, stooping double. There is yet a steeper stair to go down before the level of the prisons is reached. This is an addition of modern times, for originally the only means of access was a ladder through a hole in the floor. You arrive at last in a long vaulted stone passage lighted at rare intervals by slits in the thickness of the walls. La Maddalena, who looks, with her solitary flame, the fit custodian of these gloomy regions, unlocks and drags open a low door which admits into a narrow cell lighted only by a tiny crack in the wall. Here, she tells you, Parisina was imprisoned. Further along the passage is the so-called prison of Ugo, a still more appalling place in which the little light that enters through the triple barred chink must first find its way through four rows of bars in the outer wall and then across the corridor. The tradition that has fixed on these dungeons as the scene of the lovers' last hours and places their execution in this particular part of the Castle is very venerable. La Maddalena impresses the horrible story upon the visitor. "Tutt' e due decapitati," she repeats slowly and draws her hands significantly across her throat. Contemporary evidence, however, shows that the lovers were beheaded in the neighbouring Torre Marchesana. But the two towers may have been connected by a passage through, and we may well picture here the scene of Parisina passing to her execution, as the historian Frizzi describes it. She was led to her death, he tells us, by the same servant who had accused her to her husband. "She believed that she was to be thrown into some oubliette, and at every step she asked if she had arrived there

yet, but it was made known to her that her destiny was the axe. She asked what was become of Ugo, and the answer was that he was already dead. Then, groaning, she exclaimed : Neither do I wish to live any longer, and being come to the block, she divested herself of all her ornaments with her own hands, wrapped a cloth around her head and presented herself to the fatal blow." How far this story, which follows that of most of the chroniclers, is true in its details there is no means of telling. But it is enough to know that somewhere in these melancholy depths those two young lives were put out six hundred years ago.

The dungeon of Ugo accords in its situation with the description of Don Giulio's prison, given by a Modenese chronicler, who also says that Ferrante was thrown into one beneath it. Another set of cells does in fact exist under these, beneath the level of the moat, deprived of light and even of air. In the floor of the passage may be seen the holes, now blocked up, by which they were reached. But no human being, one would think, could have lived so long as these princes did, had they been buried in such veritable tombs. There is good reason to believe that they were in reality lodged in a decent apartment and treated with humanity, though in the first heat of the Duke's anger they were very probably imprisoned here.

But among the many who certainly inhabited these caverns, and the others like them, with which the whole base of the Castle was pierced, were the five Pii brothers, unjustly condemned for conspiracy against Duke Borso in 1469. Giovanni Marsiglia Pio, in the long metrical narrative in which he relates the sad case of himself and his brothers, tells of their arrival in the prisons, of the wet and slimy entrance, large



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enough for entering in but too narrow for those who desired to go forth, of their lamentations, grief and sighs when they saw this place of bitter death, where night could not be discerned from day. How after a time they succeeded in escaping, and two reached safety, but he himself and the others, who had disguised themselves as friars, were recognised and recaptured owing to their not having the proper hypocritical turn of the neck. Their plight was now worse than before. The writer lay upon rotten straw, with irons on his feet, deprived of air and warmth, and with scarce any water to drink or food to sustain him. After a short time he was however moved to a comparatively comfortable chamber, and accorded more merciful treatment, and eight years later, having consented to renounce all claims to his confiscated possessions, was set free.

From these sad places one ascends to the upper world and passes to very different scenes, which by a strange irony are situated just above. These are the ducal chambers which have been already mentioned and where some of the old Cinquecento splendour is still left in the gorgeous ceilings painted by Dosso and his school. In the first room, now the Sala di Consiglio, and that next to it, the decoration, consisting of classical games and exercises, depicted upon panels set amid a wreath of florid arabesques, shows the taste of the later Dukes for athleticism and contests of strength. Alfonso II. especially delighted in performing and watching bodily exercises, and kept wrestlers in his service. It illustrates also the rage for antiquity, carried almost to pedantry, in the sixteenth century. The subjects are carefully studied in all their details from classic authors. A game of ball, called Trigonale, requiring great

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dexterity, is represented in the central place in the Sala di Consiglio, with a chariot race on one side, and athletes swinging from ropes on the other. Below, the subjects are, on the window side, the "Pilae Ludus" or "Grossa Palla," also played with a ball; the throwing or rolling of a circle; and Discobuli casting their discs. On the opposite wall we see wrestlers; the casting of weights; and a sport in which the athlete, after throwing his adversary, strives to keep him down by kneeling on him. At one end of the room swimming is represented, at the other the Pyrrhic dance, two parties of armed athletes doing mimic battle to the accompaniment of music and song. In the next room the religious idea contained in the Greek love for the human form in movement is summed up by the dance of goddesses in the central panel. In the panels on either side of it are cupids playing with tops. One of the large subjects below is the game of the Otri, or wine-skins, usually played at the feasts of the Dionysian Bacchus. The wine-skins were filled with air, and the athletes sprang from one to another, or poised themselves upon them. The Xisto, or portico under which the players exercised in cold or rainy seasons, is represented by the colonnade in the background. On the opposite wall boxers are depicted, and at either end of the room respectively armed youths engaged in jumping, an exercise practised to obtain military dexterity, and a fight between two parties of athletes in which one attacks with sticks or clubs and the others defend themselves with shields and seek to entangle their adversaries in nets. The frieze beneath shows "putti" absorbed in various occupations, some dancing, some playing with little mirrors or with balls, some studying very seriously in books, two and two together, or playing on the mandoline.

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The paintings of these two rooms are by followers of Dosso. The nude figures are ill-drawn and have the coarseness which characterises the school of Dosso in its decadence. But as a part of the decoration their effect is very good ; they give an impression of lusty vigorous life which is carried on in the varied movements of the putti in the frieze and in the strong and continuous flow and change of the arabesques. These are arranged with great ingenuity in the ceiling spaces, and show a rich and fantastic imagination. The colour of the whole work is extraordinarily harmonious and pleasure-giving, especially in the second room, where the warm creamy flesh tones of the cupids are particularly charming.

We now pass through into the famous Sala dell' Aurora, the ceiling of which is frescoed by Dosso himself. The subjects here are interpreted as follows by Ferrarese writers. In the summit is represented the Determination of Human Destinies. Time holds the urn from which the Fates, in the form of beautiful maidens, are drawing the lots of men. A cupid with a broken vase, at the foot of the picture, symbolises the fragility of all mortal things. The lunettes beneath show the evanescent Hours succeeding one another in their order. Dawn.—Upon the darkness of the twilight sky Aurora is seen leading the yoked steeds of Day's chariot up out of the waves. Below her rocks the conch whereon lies the rugged Tithonus, whose side she has abandoned. He holds a lyre, symbol perhaps of the mysterious music heard according to ancient belief at break of day from the statue of Memnon, whose mother was the Aurora. The Hours surround him in the form of maidens. Noon.—The fair charioteer of the Sun is guiding his white coursers as they are about to touch the highest point of their career. Before him flies Thallon, the hottest of the

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Hours, armed with a double torch, and the goddess of Noon, confronting him, presents the middle of her shield to receive the arrow which he fits to his bow. The Meridian is between them. A basket lying on the ground overflowing with fruits denotes the fulness of the sun's gifts to earth. Above it sits the Hawk, the bird of Phoebus, with the far-seeing eye. The Vesper Hour.—In answer to the lash of the charioteer the horses dip towards the waves as if in fear and reluctance. In the car Cybele is being borne away. She has just set down the youth Triptolemus, leaving him to instruct mortals in the use of the benefits which she has bestowed upon the earth. See the wheat-ears in his hand. Love is insinuating into Cybele's ear the seductions of the youth Atys, institutor of pastoral festivities, who stands near by, idle, in sign of the repose proper to the sunset hour after the labours of the day. He plays upon the cithern. The serpent winding its tortuous coils round the axles of the chariot wheels expresses the eternal circling of the seasons in agreement with the course of the sun along the Ecliptic. Night.—Diana leans from her chariot towards the shepherd youth Endymion, who is couched upon a hemisphere, which symbolises the lunar influence dominant over the earth. Behind are seen the revengeful flames which consumed Meleagar because his father Oeneus had neglected the altars of the divine huntress, whilst he offered sacrifices to the other deities.

These radiant scenes are full of a frank and pagan joyousness. But they are works of Dosso's later years, and something of the coarseness of the decadence is apparent in them; the forms are lumpy and heavy, the draperies not always graceful. Yet how beautiful are certain figures, as for instance that of the winged Aurora with her gold hair parted upon her



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brows and crowned with roses, the idealised image perhaps of some fair lady of the Court. And the very over fulness of sensuous life which these pictures express is made poetic by the romantic feeling which distinguishes Dosso, the friend and companion of Ariosto. His mastery of light and shade and power of depicting mysterious outdoor effects are shown in the Dawn and Night. In this last fresco the scene is suffused with the lunar beams, and the dim white horses of the goddess springing up into the sky might be moonlit clouds on a windy night.

But the "putti" of the frieze surpass all the rest of the decoration in beauty. They are drawn and modelled with that loving understanding of child-form which belongs to the Italian masters. These adorable babes of Venus course round the room one after the other, each in a little car drawn by a pair of fairy-tale creatures. There is an inexpressible charm in the variety of their attitudes, in their grace and freedom of movement. The round flexible little bodies throb with life and joy.

From a decorative point of view the effect of the room is superb. The arrangement of the ceiling spaces, the unobtrusive beauty of the enclosing borders, the rich garlands of fruit suspended between, the grace and fancy of the details, show the genius of the Ferrarese school for the ornamental side of art. The delicate light hues of the borders enhance the depth and glow of the colour in the subject pictures, which they follow like a faint rainbow reflection, and the frieze with its subdued gold and green, upon which the warm transparent flesh colour of the putti is sparsely patterned, makes an exquisite finish to the decoration.

Like in the Schifanoia frescoes of an earlier century, much of the interest of these paintings lies in the

insight which they give into the life and sentiment of the period. Art has cast off all its earlier preoccupation with religious and instructive ideas and revels now in pure enjoyment. Dosso's work is an allegory of the Cinquecento day at the Court of Ferrara, with its fulness of pleasure, its music and art charming every sense, its amorous thoughts, and the profuse fruits of the earth upon which its life was nourished. The painting is like some florid and romantic melody which in its celebration of the joy of the passing moment has an undernote of tragedy, suggesting the darkness that must come. How clearly this sounds in the silence of the long-deserted room. The Day declines to Night before our eyes, and nowhere does the *sic transit gloria mundi* written everywhere in Ferrara strike one so much as in this gorgeous chamber from which the princely inhabitants who knew how to spin so much beauty around themselves have so utterly vanished.

Tasso seems to indicate this Sala when in one of his poems he calls Leonora d'Este's apartments the "Cave of the Aurora." Hence it is also known as the Sala di Leonora, and is associated with the legendary loves of the princess and the poet. Here we ought to imagine the scene of the famous kiss in the moment of which the Duke is supposed to have surprised the lovers. But neither the ethereal Leonora evoked by Goethe nor the sickly and prosaic princess of history accords with the spirit of the glowing forms upon these walls, which belong to an earlier generation and one more robust and joyous than that which produced the morbid Tasso. But there is no record left of the persons upon whom Dosso's Golden Hours have looked down. Some must have been of very different type. Close beside the Sala dell' Aurora there is a little disused chapel heaped up

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with rubbish, but with the coloured marbles with which it has been faced still left upon the walls. This is the oratory of Renata of France, who is said to have chosen this cold style of ornamentation so that there might be no place for painted images. It makes a strange neighbour to the rooms which adjoin it, and breathes a sad and serious strain into this dwelling of pleasure. One fancies the procession of the little Duchess who was "not beautiful," as her bridegroom wrote, and her sombre followers, Madame de Soubise, Olympia Morata with the pensive brow, Renaissance poets grown melancholy from satiety, black-robed scholars and divines, passing silently beneath the rosy deities of the day, whose fleeting joys they scorned, to their meditations here.

Opposite to the chapel in a little chamber, which was once a loggia opening on to the terrace outside, there are three paintings associated by a fond Ferrarese tradition with the name of Titian. The subjects are, Ariadne being conducted to her Nuptials, the Vendemmia, and the Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne. The Vendemmia is ascribed by historians of art to Dosso, and the other two to his pupils, but a recent critic, M. Harck, attributes them with more probability to Girolamo Carpi. They are interesting as the last melancholy relic of the Bacchanalian scenes with which the Dukes of Ferrara filled their palace.

In the private apartments of the Prefect there are some traces of the old ducal days. The Sala di Parisina has a fine Cinquecento ceiling, and a narrow cabinet beyond has decorations of the same period, and there are some exquisitely embroidered silk hangings, popularly ascribed to the hands of Parisina, but, needless to say, of much later date.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We were courteously permitted by the Signor Prefetto to visit these rooms.

## *The Addizione Erculea*

*The Addizione Erculea or Terra Nuova.*—The addition to the city built by Ercole I., exceeding the old Ferrara in extent, lies spread out at the foot of the slight rise upon which the Castello stands. It is parted in the midst by the Via degli Angeli (Corso Vittorio Emanuele), which runs in a long direct course, passing between stately palaces till, diminishing in the distance, it is lost to view among the thin columns of poplar trees. Half way along, the street is divided by another which makes a straight line from the gate of S. Benedetto (Porta Po) to the Porta S. Giovanni (Porta Mare), forming, with the Via degli Angeli, a great cross. From these main lines lesser streets branch out in regular order within the enclosure of the walls, which are about three miles in extent. The whole is laid out on a symmetrical plan, with the clearness which marks the Renaissance builder. But this new city, which Duke Ercole created by means of the heavy labour of his poorer subjects, and at ruinous cost to his nobles, who exhausted their substance in building sumptuous palaces, and which with its splendid streets is the measure of his spirit, not of their needs, was raised on an unstable foundation. As soon as the order of things changed it decayed. Already in Alfonso II.'s time it appeared empty and quiet. Montaigne, who came here in 1580 on his tour in Italy, describes Ferrara as having many palaces and being very little populated.

A deeper silence has settled upon it to-day. The Via degli Angeli, the most splendid of its streets, is now the most forsaken. In the spring the grass grows between the cobbles. The sound of a footstep, the roll of a carriage echoes in the stillness between the tall buildings. From palace walls the stucco peels, revealing the warm colour



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of the old brick beneath, and through the sculptured and pillared doorways you glance into gardens that are overgrown and abandoned.

But decay has not marred the beauty of the street which Ercole "threw out to meet the Muses." Its peace and solitude under the pensive sunshine of the noonday, the continual song of the birds in the gardens, the golden hues which Time has laid upon the palaces, make it the fit scene for the "slow procession and song of a fantastic epos" and the forms of princes and poets which the Italian singer of to-day evokes out of the past to people it.<sup>1</sup> Only a great melancholy reigns where the viols and flutes and voices of men once sounded, especially at the twilight hour, when the old buildings glow with a sunset colour that gives them an inexpressibly sad charm. Passing at that hour by the great closed-up portal of the Sacratì palace, where the grass grows tall at the foot of the steps, one recalls a picture by that artist who painted Venus rising for the second time from the sea, with the foreknowledge in her face of the misunderstanding that awaited her in the world of men, and wonders whether, in the outcast weeping upon the steps before a fast shut door, Botticelli meant to figure that same Renaissance Venus cast out once more from the habitations into which she had been received.

The buildings of the Addizione are not great monuments of architecture, but beautiful examples of private dwellings distinguished by a mingled stateliness and grace, fit shells for their luxurious and artistic inhabitants. At the crossing of the streets in Via degli Angeli stand four palaces which, with their commanding prospects, were considered "cosa

<sup>1</sup> See Carducci's Ode, *Alla Città di Ferrara*.



CORTILE, PALAZZO DE' DIAMANTI.



## *The Addizione Erculea*

di gran bellezza and meraviglia," in the seventeenth century, when Marcantonio Guarini wrote his book describing Ferrara.

"Bella porta, bell' entrata  
Bel canton, bella facciata,"

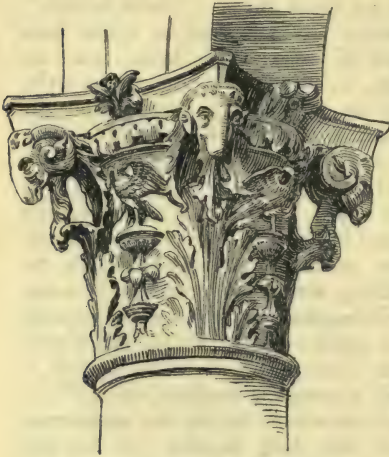
ran a popular rhyme about them. "Bella facciata" refers to the Palazzo de' Diamanti, so called from its curious vesture of great stones hewn into the shape of diamonds, a variation of the rustic style, suggested perhaps by Ercole I.'s emblem of the Diamond, and seized on by the architect to give something of lightness and fantasy to a style unusually cold and severe for this city of brick. It was built by Biagio Rossetti in 1493. The actual doorway, with its clumsily executed bas-reliefs, is of the seventeenth century. But the marble pilasters, which face the corners of the building, are carved in the best Renaissance style, with arabesques, into which are introduced figures of extreme grace—Venus, Vulcan and Cupid, Hercules with his club and lion's skin—as well as fauns and winged grotesques, trophies, etc. These sculptured pilasters relieve very happily the monotonous diapered effect of the long façades. A beautiful marble colonnade with ornate composite capitals, in which the eagle of the Estensi and other devices appear, faces into the court, which is filled in with a charming garden, full of flowering trees and rose plots half swallowed in grass. A fine carved well-head, brought hither from the Convent of S. Giuseppe, stands in the midst of the moss-grown paths, and some very interesting fragments of Renaissance sculpture and terra-cotta work and early Ferrarese fresco are ranged round the court and in the little loggia on the south side.



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The palace belonged to the ducal House. It was built for Don Sigismondo, brother of Ercole I., and was inhabited by princes of Este till the loss of the duchy, when it was sold by the Duke of Modena to the Villa family. Cardinal Luigi was the last of its princely tenants, and the feasts which he gave in it

exceeded in magnificence and extravagance all that had taken place there before. In the great gardens which then stretched behind the princesses Lucrezia and Eleonora took refuge during the earthquakes of 1570, being carried thither fainting with terror from the ducal palace by their brother the Cardinal.



CAPITAL, PALAZZO DE' DIAMANTI.

The great upper chambers of the now uninhabited palace are used as the public Picture Gallery, to which we shall return later—and the Ateneo Civico occupies the ground floor.

The “bella porta” of the rhyme belongs to the Sacrati or Prosperi palace, and is the most beautiful architectural relic of the Renaissance in Ferrara. The palace was built in the last years of the fifteenth or the first of the sixteenth century for Francesco Castelli,

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the physician and favourite of Ercole I. But the portal, that "florid arch" which was "made to receive only poets and duchesses," is a few years later in date. The design of it, once attributed erroneously to Baldassarre Perucci, is ascribed by Signor Venturi to Ercole Grandi. It is a very stately construction of marble and stone set upon a wide flight of steps, and is ornamented with rich arabesques and heads of warriors leaning out of encircling laurel wreaths, and with medallions of Roman Emperors, and bronze plaques, showing on one side of the door, Mercury with the Three Graces, on the other a warrior treading an enemy under his horse's feet. But the most original feature is the delicate balcony poised above, upheld on the shoulders of cupids, which crowns the noble lines of the doorway below with an airy grace, and gives a romantic and fanciful touch, truly Ferrarese, to the classical spirit of the whole structure. These cupids are modelled with great skill, and seem to have the plasticity of life, and all the details show great charm and grace, especially the ornaments ranged upon the balustrade of the balcony, a monkey, a classic head on either side, and a pair of delicious baby cupids fighting and kissing at each end.

The colour of the Verona marble, and the terra-cotta used in the ornamentation, softened and melted now by time and weather into exquisitely ruddy and golden hues, and bordered above and below by the cool grey of the stone, is indescribably harmonious and delightful. The steps are ornamented with incised patterns, in which the device of the original owner, a castle, is introduced. The two marble lions, of Romanesque style, which used to stand on either side of the doorway, and from which it took the name by which it is often called, the *Porta de' Leoni*, have been removed by the present owner to the courtyard of the palace.

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The angles of the palace are faced with marble pilasters, carved with delicate arabesques in low relief, in the purest taste of the Renaissance, and pronounced by Burckhardt the best work of this period to be seen in Ferrara. A charming effect is produced by the warm colour of the marble upon the old brick house.

The great Bevilacqua palace opposite, which had the "bell' entrata" of Guarini's rhyme, has been entirely reconstructed, and is now used as artillery barracks. The family of Bevilacqua, one of the noblest and richest under the Dukes, and said to be of the same stock as the Belacqua whose laziness brought a smile to Dante's lips in the *Purgatorio*, possessed no less than five of the largest palaces in the city. This particular one was sold to Alfonso I., and was inhabited by his son Don Alfonso. The other palace of the distich, begun by Aldobrandino Turchi in 1493, still remains in a state of picturesque decay, and keeps the marble pilasters, with finely-carved capitals at its corner. A palace, higher up on the same side, with an ornate modern façade of pretentious style, originally belonged to the unfortunate Don Giulio d'Este, and on the confiscation of his possessions in 1506 it was bestowed upon Niccolò da Correggio, on whose death the Duke took it back again and gave it to Cardinal Ippolito I.'s natural daughter Elisabetta on her marriage with Giberto Pio di Savoia.

Beyond the barracks, some way along, stands the palace built by Battista Guarini, son of the old Veronese humanist, and inhabited by his prosperous and scholarly posterity, among them the author of the *Pastor Fido*. The legends inscribed upon the pilasters at the angle—"Herculis et musarum commercio," and "Favete animis et linguis," show how much the

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building of this beautiful street was influenced by the poetic inspiration and enthusiasm for intellectual pleasures which animated Duke Ercole and his nobles.

A little beyond this the cobblestones end, and the poplars, which the poets figure as the Eliadi weeping for the fallen Phaeton, take the place of the palaces. On the left hand fields of grass and vegetables spread where lay the long-vanished "delizie" of Belfiore, and the palace loved by Leonello, and which he filled with his treasures of art and antiquity. It was inhabited in the next century by that famous patron of art and letters, Cardinal Ippolito II., who gave some wonderful garden feasts there. It was at Belfiore that Benvenuto Cellini was lodged when working in Ferrara for the Cardinal, and where he shot and ate the peacocks in the park around, for the sake of his health, he tells us—pronouncing them to be the only good things in Ferrara. Sta. Maria degli Angeli, the most beautiful church in the city, and specially favoured by the Estensi in the fifteenth century, stood close to Belfiore. It was built by Niccolò III., and Pope Eugenius III. granted it the privileges enjoyed by the church of the same name at Assisi. After the extinction of the Dukes the church fell into decay, and was finally demolished in the last century, and the bones of its founder Niccolò, and of Leonello and Ercole I. and many other princes of Este buried in it, lie now somewhere beneath the grass, quite unmarked and forgotten. In the splendid convent attached to the church, which has also perished without trace, Leonello established a public library for the use of students.

To the west of the Angeli lay the magnificent Convent of Sta. Caterina da Siena, built by Ercole I. for his famous saint, Lucia da Narni, whom he stole from



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the Viterbesi. This also has utterly perished, and all this great space within the walls is now depopulated.

The long *Via degli Angeli* ends upon the walls at the disused gate. Through this gate the Dukes and their guests used to ride forth to the chase, and across a bridge over the moat which then lay under the city walls all round, into the wide hunting-grounds of the Barco outside. By this gate also passed out the dispossessed heir of Ferrara in 1597.

A little to the east lies the Certosa. This monastery was built for Carthusian monks by Duke Borso. Enlarged and enriched by Ercole I., it became the most splendid of the many religious establishments in the *Addizione*. But now its wide courts and cloisters, with their graceful arcades, are more silent even than when the monks inhabited their solitary little dwellings built over the cloisters, each separated from its neighbour; it is literally a city of the dead, having been made into the public cemetery. The alterations and restorations for its present purpose have robbed it of much of its beauty; the terra-cotta ornamentation has been nearly everywhere renewed and the colour is unpleasantly bright. The sarcophagus of Duke Borso, the only one of the sovereigns of Ferrara whose dust has escaped oblivion, is placed against a wall in a conspicuous position, having been moved hither from the church. It is ornamented with Renaissance arabesques and the Latin inscription above it records the name and titles of the prince and that none was wiser or better than he, under whom Ferrara tasted her Age of Gold. Another of the ducal House, Marfisa d'Este, has been uprooted from the Church of the Consolation and laid in one of the newly-made mortuary chapels, where her tombstone may be seen upon the wall. There is little else of interest in the

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long corridors—except a fragment of old sculpture here and there, brought from some old church or convent.

Between the road and the crowded precincts of the cemetery there is a wide green space reserved to bury strangers in. One single grave occupies it, that of a young Englishman, struck down by cholera when passing through the city during an epidemic some forty years ago.

The present Church of the Certosa, dedicated to S. Cristoforo, was founded by Ercole I. and finished by his son Alfonso. The earthquake of 1570 almost ruined it, but it was soon rebuilt by the monks themselves. It is a spacious Renaissance building, pleasantly dark and cool within, decorated with late sixteenth-century arabesques and pictures of the decadence. Upon the bases of the pilasters in the nave are some beautiful sculptures of the early part of the same century, arabesques of florid and graceful design in which the Eagle of Este and the devices of Duke Borso, the Unicorn, the Paraduro, Alfonso I.'s Grenade, are introduced, and the Cross appears repeatedly, enclosed in true Renaissance fashion in the midst of the decorative frivolities. The fine choir stalls with intarsia work, which were originally in S. Andrea, are probably by Pietro dalle Lanze, the maker of those in the Duomo.

The Via Borso leads from here into the Piazza Nuova (Piazza Ariostea). This wide space was designed by Ercole I. to be the centre of his Addizione, which was to have been completed by a column rising here and bearing an equestrian statue of himself. But the project was not accomplished. The Duke died, the statue never came into existence, and only one of the columns destined to bear it reached the city, to lie for years unused. Ironic fate decreed that it should be set up finally to bear the effigy of the usurper,

Clement VIII. He, however, was displaced in 1796, when the army of Republican France occupied Ferrara, and in the presence of Napoleon Bonaparte an image of Liberty was set on the column. But this was short-lived, and was succeeded in 1810 by a statue of the Liberator himself, turned despot, which was destroyed four years later. Now upon the column reigns one who represents a more lasting sovereignty and freedom, Lodovico Ariosto. The statue is a modern work, set up in 1833.

Of the palaces that should line the Piazza only two exist, and their long colonnades stand out with aristocratic effect among the meaner houses. The Palazzo Bevilacqua, built by some of the Strozzi in 1499, from whom it passed afterwards to the Bevilacqua family, has one of the most beautiful cortiles of the period, with double storied colonnades and arches ornamented with delicate terra-cotta mouldings. It wears the same grace of melancholy as the rest of the Herculean city. The faded pink and amber stucco peels from the mouldering brick walls and the court is swallowed up in a growth of green. It has been robbed of its beautiful staircase and of the ornamentation of the windows, removed by the Bevilacqua to their palace in Bologna, and the great apartments have been turned into a number of small tenements.

The Palazzo Massari in Corso Mare, also built by a Bevilacqua, and now modernised, contains a collection of pictures, among them a very interesting Annunciation, attributed to Cosimo Tura, but probably the work of one of his pupils; a Madonna and Child, which bears the name of Galasso, but appears to belong to a later date, and others of the Ferrarese school.

Casa Ariosto.—Walking westwards by the Corso from the Piazza Nuova, past the cross-roads of the Via degli Angeli, you reach the Via Ariosto, once charm-

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ingly named Via Mirasole, where the poet bought a plot of land in 1528 and made himself a house and garden, out of the proceeds of his labours, choosing this quiet place on the edge of the city far removed from the Court, of which he was so weary. Here he spent his time in polishing the verses of his *Orlando*, and in cultivating his garden, almost as dear to him as his poem. Virginio Ariosto has given a delightful account of his father as a gardener: "In the things of the garden he used the same method as in making verses, for never did he leave anything which he planted more than three months in one place, and if he planted peach stones or seed of any kind he went so many times to see if they had sprouted that finally he broke the shoot; and because he had little knowledge of herbs, most times he presumed that any herb which sprouted close to the thing sown by him was it; he tended it with great diligence till the thing had reached a point where there could be no doubt as to what it was. I remember that, having sown some capers, he went every day to see them and had great joy over his fine crop; in the end he found that they were elders."

The house still stands in the silent and solitary street which Lamartine likens to a cathedral close; like the immortal spirit of its builder it keeps a youthful freshness and charm amid the decay around. It is now public property and is kept up in memory of the poet. Simple and well-proportioned, it is a dignified example of a small domestic building of the Renaissance. The famous line, "*Parva sed apta mihi, sed nulli obnoxia, sed non sordida, parta meo sed tamen aere domus*" ("Small, but suitable for me, hurtful to no one, neither mean, but yet acquired by my own money (my) home.") is inscribed across the façade, and breathes a sweet content, though its author would often complain, when his friends asked him why he did not build a more



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magnificent dwelling, that it was easier to build palaces in his verses and cost less than to do it in bricks. The



CASA ARIOSTO, FROM GARDEN.

more ornate inscription on the tablet above is by Virginio Ariosto. Through the vestibule you step into a charming garden court embowered in fruit trees and thick with flowers and grass, but only a small part

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of the original domain of the poet. The rooms upstairs are very pleasant. Some faded fragrance left behind by that dweller of four centuries ago, some trace of his sweet and joyous temper, and the sunny calm of his old age, seems to linger in the place. Though none of the articles of furniture shown as his are authentic relics, they are of Cinquecento style and keep up the illusion that all remains as it was that night in 1533 when his dead body was quietly carried forth and laid in S. Benedetto close by. But the bones of him who loved simplicity and scorned the pompous shows of the world were in 1801 sacrilegiously dragged out of the inconspicuous place which he had chosen for his rest and transported with bombastic parade to the Public Library, and his tomb must now be looked for there.

S. Benedetto, a large church of Renaissance form, with the convent adjoining, was built by the monks of Pomposa, who had been driven out by malaria from their old home. It was begun in 1496, but not finished till 1550, and the campanile, which leans in an extraordinary manner, is a hundred years later in date. Inside the church is decorated with late and inferior pictures and very florid arabesques in grisaille. The convent was secularised by Napoleon and is used as barracks. The cloisters are very beautiful. In the old refectory, which can now only be visited by special permission, a late sixteenth-century fresco of the Last Supper by a Ferrarese artist covers the ceiling. It is a poor production, but the arabesques which complete the decoration, and the small scenes from the Old Testament which they enclose, have the grace and charm which still remained in the decorative work of the school. One of the heads in the Last Supper is supposed to be a portrait of Ariosto, but if so, it was done long after his death.

## CHAPTER XII

### *The Pictures of Ferrara*

The Pinacoteca. Palazzo Santini.

THE Pinacoteca in the Palazzo de' Diamanti contains an interesting collection composed chiefly of pictures by artists of the school of Ferrara, which in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was one of the most prominent in North Italy. Of all the inhabitants of the Emilia, says Morelli, none were so richly endowed with artistic gifts as the Ferrarese, and in this respect they rank with the Veronese, whom they surpass, however, in passion and depth of feeling. It is not till comparatively late that Ferrara shows a distinct artistic development of her own. The works of her painters earlier than the fifteenth century have mostly disappeared; those that do exist—and fragments of fresco paintings are continually being discovered beneath the whitewash in disused churches and cloisters in the city—show little distinction from the Giottesque school of painting which prevailed in this part of the country in the fourteenth century. It was not till the reign of Niccolò III. in the first half of the fifteenth that a genuine artistic impulse made itself felt in Ferrara. Many artists are heard of in the city at this time, though few of their works survive. Antonio Alberti was one who enjoyed wide reputation. Vasari calls him “a very good painter of his time,”

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and he was entrusted by the Marquis Niccolò with the task of frescoing the scene of the great Council of the Churches in 1438 upon the walls of the Palazzo del Paradiso, a work which has unfortunately perished. A Madonna and Saints in St. Antonio in Polesine has hitherto been attributed to Alberti, but a recent critic (M. Brach) denies him the authorship of it. Otherwise there is nothing of his existing in Ferrara. Giovanni Oriolo, by whom we have a portrait of Leonello d'Este in the National Gallery, is another artist of this time. The growth of art in Ferrara was much encouraged by the presence of the great masters whom Niccolò III. and his son Leonello called to their Court—the most conspicuous of whom were Vittore Pisano, Jacopo Bellini, the founder of the Venetian school, and Roger van der Weyden. Bono da Ferrara, who is also represented in the National Gallery by a little St. Jerome, was a pupil of Pisano's. But neither the Veronese artist nor the others we have mentioned had any share in forming the individual character of Ferrarese painting. It was the influence of the realistic methods and aims of the Paduan Squarcione, acting upon natural tendencies, which determined the direction which the new school took, through its most representative fifteenth-century painters, Cosimo Tura and Francesco Cossa.

One of the first distinctively Ferrarese painters is Galasso, who was born about 1430. He was employed by the Estensi, but chiefly in unimportant commissions, and before long he left Ferrara for Bologna, where he spent most of his life. He shows in his pictures the desire for realism which had taken hold of the Ferrarese.

Cosimo Tura, known as Cosmé, was born about the same time as Galasso, but he makes an enormous advance upon his companion, and is the real founder



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of the school of Ferrara. He zealously studied the learned methods of Squarcione, and the manner in which they were developed by the great Andrea Mantegna in the frescoes of the Eremitani at Padua. Cosmé was also affected, though in lesser degree, by the example of Piero della Francesca, who worked for Borso d'Este many years in Ferrara. But while sensitive to outer influences, Tura had too powerful a personality to be a mere follower of others. His genius took a course of its own, creating a new and independent style which impressed itself enduringly upon the art of his native city.

At first sight his manner is not very prepossessing. He did not occupy himself with superficial beauty. His temperament is above all dramatic, and his first object is to express his subject, which he does with uncompromising vigour. But so lofty, so dignified and profound is his conception of it that his homeliest types are imbued with a spiritual beauty which is deeply impressive. He has certain very pronounced idiosyncrasies, derived in the first instance from the example of the Paduans, but exaggerated by his vehement nature almost at times to eccentricity — such as a love for tormented and arbitrary folds in his draperies, for strange shapes of rocks in his backgrounds, for classic architecture loaded with exuberant and fantastic ornament. The grace and rich invention which he shows in his decorative details are continued in nearly all the painters of this school, and are distinguishing traits of every branch of Ferrarese art. His rich and harmonious colouring is also very individual. The Madonna and Angels in the National Gallery is a very beautiful and characteristic example of it. He must have learnt it from his surroundings. Even now you may see the same sort of hues in the garments of the poor people in the old crowded streets

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of the city. There is a suggestion too in it of the sea and marine things, and surely it was the influence of the amphibious world around which bred in him his love for the dolphins, conches and coral-like devices which repeat themselves in his paintings.

Tura was highly thought of in his own age. Duke Borso appointed him Court painter in 1458, but employed his genius rather unworthily, chiefly in trifling decorative works, and Ercole I. continued to require of him designs for tapestries and services of silver, etc. But he also adorned the cabinet of this Duke with frescoes, and painted for him many portraits of his children. His work was in request outside his native city, and for Gio. Francesco Pico, father of the famous Pico, he painted the library of the palace at Mirandola with images of Poetry and the Sybils, and of the Nine Muses dancing and holding out crowns to Orpheus, Hesiod, Virgil and the great singers. Giovanni Santi, the father of Raphael, celebrates Tura in a poem among the foremost painters of his day, putting him on a par with Giovanni and Gentile Bellini.

Francesco Cossa, who was born about 1438, imbibed, like Tura, the principles of the Paduan school. But he was of very different temperament to his fellow-artist and lent himself much more to the influence of Piero della Francesca. He is not represented in this Gallery, but some of his finest work is to be seen in the Palazzo Schifanoia. He did not work much in his native city, which he abandoned in 1470, spending his life afterwards chiefly in the service of the Bentivogli, lords of Bologna, where several paintings of his may yet be seen.

Baldassarre d'Este, another artist of renown in his day, was born about 1440. He was an illegitimate child of Niccolò III., but though he used the arms

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and emblems of the Estensi, and was employed by the Dukes in honourable offices, he did not take rank with the princes of the House. He was chiefly noted for his skill in portraiture, a branch of painting in which the Ferrarese, with their love for realism, early excelled. He is only recalled now by one or two works rather doubtfully attributed to him.

Ercole Roberti, whose works are also rare, is of very much greater distinction. He was a pupil of Tura's and learnt much from his native school, but the influence of other painters, of Mantegna especially, and of Piero della Francesca and Gian Bellini was strong upon him. He is a brilliant and harmonious colourist and very skilled in rendering air and light. His landscape backgrounds are full of poetic feeling, a quality which becomes characteristic of the Ferrarese at this time and in the next century. There is but one little work of Ercole Roberti's in Ferrara, in the Santini collection. The National Gallery is fortunate in possessing a beautiful little picture of his, the *Children of Israel in the Wilderness*. He was born between 1450 and 1460 and worked a great deal for Ercole I., who made him Court painter when Tura died in 1495.

The works of Domenico Panetti (born about 1460) have survived in abundance in Ferrara, showing how just was Vasari's description of his style as "dry and laboured." From this city also proceeded Lorenzo Costa, who, as fellow-worker with Francia, impressed the Ferrarese traditions upon the rising school of Bologna. But Costa, though he studied under Tura and learnt much from the example of Cossa and Ercole Roberti, was influenced a great deal by a stay of three years in Tuscany, and while his pictures reveal his Ferrarese origin, they show a new inclination towards grace and suavity. He lived

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little in Ferrara, where no work of his is to be seen. Gio. Bentivoglio summoned him to Bologna, where he lived many years, and later on he became Court painter at Mantua in succession to Mantegna.

Ercole Grandi, who was long confounded with his fellow-citizen, Ercole Roberti, was more faithful to his native city. He was about two years younger than Costa. He studied at Bologna, but returned to Ferrara as a young man, and was employed at the Court. A number of less important painters, chief of whom are Mazzolino, remarkable for his strong and brilliant colouring and the charm of his small works, Francesco Bianchi Ferrari, Coltellini and Pellegrino Munari, flourished also at this time. They show how much the effect of Tura's noble and serious spirit had died out and how the influence of neighbouring cities, and especially of the rich and sensuous art of Venice, was now making itself felt among the Ferrarese.

This became more apparent still in the later painters, especially in Giovanni Lutero, surnamed Dosso, the greatest Ferrarese painter of the sixteenth century. Dosso was the son of a Court official, and with his brother Battista travelled a good deal in his youth and stayed some years at Venice, where the work of the great Giorgione must have deeply impressed him. He was afterwards constantly employed by Alfonso I., to whom his art was very congenial. Vasari, speaking of Dosso, says: "Together with the gift which the Fates made to Ferrara in the birth of the divine Messer Lodovico Ariosto, accompanying the pen with the brush (*penna con pennello*) they willed that Dosso also should be born." It is impossible indeed to look at Dosso's works without remembering Ariosto. Poet and painter frequented the same Court and were intimate friends. "Both," says Mr Berenson, "were



lovers of 'high romance' and both had the power to create it, the one in verse, the other in colour, with a splendour that perhaps many other Italians could have equalled, but with a fantasy, a touch of magic, more characteristic of English genius in the Elizabethan period than of Italian genius at any time." Dosso was deeply interested, like the other painters of his own day, in light and atmosphere, and it is often by means of daring effects of chiaroscuro that he imparts the glamour and mystery to his pictures which is their peculiar charm. His outdoor scenes are especially interesting. In his colour he is as splendid as the Venetians. He was a man of great personal charm—"uomo affabile e piacevole molto," Vasari calls him. Something of this character has impressed itself on his pictures. His brother Battista, who was also an artist, worked with him. But the two were on very bad terms, for Battista, a sour fellow, was bitterly jealous of Giovanni's success and popularity and did everything he could to annoy and hinder him, even to hiding his canvases. When they worked together they were like dumb men—they never spoke, but wrote with charcoal what it was necessary to say to one another. This ill-feeling did not divide them in life, nor has it divided their memories. Their names are linked in their works and Ariosto has celebrated them together, in great company, in the *Orlando* (Canto XXXIII.):

"Leonardo, Andrea Mantegna, Gian Bellino,  
Duo Dossi, e quel ch' a par sculpe e colora  
Michel, più che mortale, Angel divino."

Battista, though not equal to Giovanni, had considerable talent in landscape and was an admirable decorator.

Beyond Dosso the school of Ferrara does not advance. Its decadence even begins to appear in him.

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His forms are often coarse and heavy, and these faults are exaggerated by his scholars, whose art sinks to gross materialism, unredeemed by technical ability. The pagan scenes, to which he lends charm and romance, become in their hands dull and conventional, and the school, losing all vigour, dies out in the vulgarities of Bastianino and his fellows, who of all their artistic inheritance show only a genius for decorative design, as the rich arabesques still existing in Ferrarese palaces testify.

Dosso had one or two contemporaries who enjoyed and still enjoy considerable renown. Of these Benvenuto Tisi da Garofalo is the best known. His works are more abundant in Ferrara than any other painter's. He was born in 1481; studied at Ferrara and Cremona, and afterwards in Rome. On a second visit to the Eternal City he was so filled with admiration for the work of Raphael, who was two years his junior, that he entered the atelier of the young Umbrian master and went to school again. His later works show very markedly the influence of Raphael. Garofalo was a very industrious and conscientious painter, but he had no great force of personality. His forms lack animation, and his sentiment is unreal and unconvincing, and his colour completely without the richness and charm which the Ferrarese usually show. He had nothing of the joyous spirit of Dosso, and his decorative work is wanting in fancy and grace. Giovanni Benvenuti, called l'Ortolano, on account of his father's trade of greengrocer, is less well known than Garofalo, to whom his works have often been attributed, but he has very much greater power and depth of feeling and is an artist of great merit. We have a fine picture of his in the National Gallery. Girolamo Carpi, a pupil of Garofalo's, enjoyed a good deal of reputation in his time and was

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patronised by the Estensi. Ferrara, land of clay and brick, produced no school of sculpture, and her only sculptor of note was Alfonsi Lombardi, who, however, worked almost altogether at Bologna.

To Ferrarese painters belongs the honour of having developed the genius of the great Correggio, in whom the art of the Emilia reached its culmination. Correggio's earliest master is said to have been Francesco Bianchi Ferrari, and when about fourteen he went to Bologna and spent several years studying under Costa and Francia, and thus acquired a thorough training in Ferrarese principles of painting. But it was Giovanni Dosso, with whom he came in contact while still a youth, whose influence worked most strongly upon the young artist. "To Dosso Correggio owed the first impulse to that study of effects of light and shadow and of aerial perspective, in which he afterwards went beyond everything that had been done before him."<sup>1</sup>

Ferrara was distinguished in other branches of art, especially in the miniaturing of books, as the *Corali* of the Cathedral and another collection in the Schifanoia palace show. The illustrations of some of the early printed books preserved in the Communal Library, and of other productions of the Ferrarese printing presses to be seen in different parts of the world, show the high excellence to which the city attained also in wood engraving. Tapestry working was early practised here. Niccolò III. introduced workers from Flanders and the art was much encouraged by Leonello and Borso. The Estensi became possessors of very beautiful tapestries, with which they decked their palaces for great occasions, and which they generously lent to other princes and to their nobles for weddings and great festivals. But though the

<sup>1</sup> *Study and Criticism of Art*, by B. Berenson.

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designs of these were furnished by Ferrarese artists, the best workers were foreigners from the Low Countries. The industry declined under Ercole I., who, in his turn, borrowed hangings from his neighbours. In the disturbed times of Alfonso I. the industry almost died out, but Ercole II. revived it and employed some famous workers. Giovanni Rost, who became the best tapestry artist in Italy in the sixteenth century, was formed at Ferrara under Giovanni Karcher, the worker of the Cathedral banners. The manufacture of stamped leather in the Cordova style also flourished greatly in Ferrara, and, thanks to the interest taken in majolica by Alfonso I., the potter's art attained great excellence here.

Visitors should begin with the third room of the Pinacoteca, which contains the most interesting pictures in the collection and the earliest examples of the school of Ferrara.

Sala Terza. S. Girolamo, by Cosimo Tura.—The quiet dignity of this composition is very impressive. The gracious curve of the arch, the simplicity and repose of the general lines, the deep rich colour, are in perfect accord with the expression of sad and profound meditation upon the homely face of the saint. The thin and sensitive hands are especially beautiful. Tura's mannerisms are less striking here than in some of his works, but the ample drapery, with its elaborate and angular folds, arranged so as to show the form beneath, is very characteristic, and so is the charming design of dolphins upon the archway, which recalls the decoration one often sees upon buildings in Ferrara. The Entombment, by Galasso.—This group of ill-favoured persons gathered round the body of the dead Christ, whose head is of a most unbeautiful type, is depicted with a strenuous effort at realism. The shortcomings of the



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picture are redeemed by sincerity of feeling, and the colour is remarkable for its enamel-like brilliance. The Crucifixion, with a Pietà beneath, and a Dream of the Virgin, by Cristoforo da Ferrara.—This artist, a contemporary of Galasso's, had not thrown off the Giottesque traditions of earlier days. The Trial and the Martyrdom of S. Maurelius.—Two very interesting little round pictures, formerly attributed to Cossa, and now assigned by Morelli and other critics to Tura, and thought to belong to a set of five "tondi," once part of an altarpiece in the Church of S. Giorgio. They lack, however, the vigour of sentiment and movement which one looks for in Tura. The Trinity, by Galasso Gallassi.—This is not the Galasso of the Entombment, but, according to Morelli, an earlier painter. The Dead Christ, by Ercole Grandi.—This fine picture shows in its great technical superiority to the Galasso just above how far the school had advanced by the end of the century. The great change in feeling is also apparent. The emotional expression here is spoilt by affectation and sentimentality. The Nativity, by the same artist.—This is a very attractive little picture full of grace and simplicity and with an exquisite landscape background. The Dead Christ, by Panetti.—This little work shows also a feeling for landscape, and is rich in colour and much more pleasing than most of Panetti's. An altarpiece in five compartments, by Coltellini.—A poor work for its date, but there is a charm in its naïveté and quaintness. St. Louis and St. Bernardino, above, are not early enough in style for Antonio Alberti, to whom they are attributed. The Pietà, by Antonio Alcottti.—A work of very little merit. The date and the name of the painter are written upon it backwards.

Sala Seconda. The Annunciation, by Panetti.—The spacious composition and large background of

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water and hills are the only points which redeem this picture, with its stiff and laboured figures, clumsy draperies and heavy opaque colour. The Angel of the Annunciation, and the Virgin, by the same artist. — Large feeble works of no artistic beauty. The Madonna and Child, with S. Girolamo and S. Geminiano, the patrons of Modena, by Pellegrino Munari.—A conventional composition, with lifeless figures, but pleasant in colour. The decoration of the step of the throne with small monochrome scenes (the Children of Israel in the Wilderness, the Egyptian Host in the Red Sea, and in the middle the Circumcision) is a style of ornamentation much used by the Ferrarese.

Sala Quarta. This splendid hall has an elaborately coffered ceiling, which lacks, however, the gilding and painted designs with which it should have been finished. Besides a number of seventeenth-century portraits of miscellaneous persons, there is the Triumph of the Church, by Garofalo, a great allegorical fresco originally in the refectory of St. Andrea. In this the Crucified Christ appears in the midst, and on His left and on His right female figures emblematic respectively of the Old and the New Dispensations. The Sacraments are symbolised in a stream of blood from His side, directed by the figure of the Church in three jets upon a child being baptized, a penitent receiving absolution, and a priest sacrificing at the altar, while above St. Paul is preaching to a crowd, and below Adam and Eve appear at the open door of Limbo. A sword pierces the Jewish figure, who is blindfolded. She sits upon a wounded and weeping ass. About her are the ruins of Solomon's temple, and a despairing priest stands with a ram, the vain instrument of sacrifice, before an altar. Appropriate legends from Holy Writ appear on tablets in the sky, and in the midst is seen

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God the Father above the walls of the Heavenly Jerusalem, wherein are two doors, one open, the other shut. Vasari calls this fresco, "*bella e capriciosa invenzione.*" The Pietà, by Alfonso Lombardi.—This little terra-cotta relief, with a graceful figure of Christ, is in a corner of the gallery.

Sala Quinta. The raising of Lazarus, by Garofalo.—An important, but unpleasing, example of this painter, weak and even vulgar in its realisation of the subject and grey and chalky in colouring. The Vision of St. Bernard, by Guercino.—A great advance in style towards modern ideas of painting.

Sala Sesta. St. John in Patmos, by Dosso.—In this picture, which represents the saint as a youth with curling hair, the artist has not troubled about the spiritual significance of his subject. He has seized the opportunity to paint a beautiful effect of light. "In Dosso's compositions," to quote Mr. Berenson again, "the groups always appear to be looking out upon the landscape from a cavern." This admirably describes the impression given by this picture. The figure is affected and theatrical, but the rich dark hues of the rock and trees, the moonlike radiance of the vision appearing between the clouds, and the great space behind of distant country and serene luminous sky, are depicted with the imagination of a poet. The Madonna and Child, with St. John the Baptist and St. Jerome, by Garofalo.—This work shows the better taste and the conventional grace which this painter acquired from his association with Raphael. The veiled and black-robed patroness (Lodovica Trotti) in the background is a fine piece of portraiture. The Adoration of the Magi, by Garofalo.—The two pictures of this subject, in this room, are considered some of the masterpieces of the artist. The second has a fine landscape background. The Nativity, by l'Ortolano, has

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much charm and grace. The Salutation, by Panetti.—Stiff and awkward figures seen against a spacious sky and landscape. The Nativity, by Mazzolino.—An important work. It shows this painter's addiction to strong hot colouring and the bald heads of the saints are another idiosyncrasy repeated often in his pictures. The Madonna with Saints, by Coltellini.—A picture which shows a much more advanced style than that by the same painter in the third room.

Sala Settima. The ceiling of this room is adorned with seventeenth-century arabesques. The most important pictures it contains are: The Beheading of St. Aurelius, by Guercino. The Death of the Virgin, by Carpaccio, a characteristic example of the Venetian master. The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian, by Ercole Grandi, which shows an Umbrian grace and charm in the soft and slender nude figure of the saint, the quiet beauty of the background (a wide street of palaces and churches, such as the Giovecca may once have appeared) and the gentle harmonious colour. It is not very characteristic of Ercole Grandi and doubts have been raised as to his authorship of it. The Massacre of the Innocents, by Garofalo.—This picture, which roused the enthusiastic admiration of Vasari, is another of this painter's large and painstaking efforts, in which the repulsive realism is not redeemed by any real dignity of expression, or beauty of composition or of colour. A little picture by the same artist—a priest at the altar—is a simple and graceful little composition, pleasant in colour and sincere in sentiment.

Sala Ottava. The Annunciation, by Dosso, a work hardly worthy of the artist to whom it is attributed. The Assumption of St. Mary of Egypt.—This curious picture is variously ascribed to Ercole Grandi and to the Umbrian, Timoteo Viti. St. Andrea, by



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Panetti.—Considered to be the best work of that artist.

Sala Nona. The end wall of this, the last room, is filled by an enormous altarpiece painted by Dosso for the church of St. Andrea, and looked upon as his masterpiece. It has suffered some bad repainting. This perhaps accounts for the glaring contrasts of light and shadow, which give it a broken, restless and theatrical effect. The figure of St. John the Evangelist sitting on the step of the throne is particularly striking in that respect. The Madonna herself is a very gorgeous lady. She suggests the influence of Giorgione upon the painter. In the side wings are seen on one side St. George, a realistically painted cavalier, whose armour shines with strange fiery reflections, and on the other St. Sebastian, whose nude form against the rich green draperies behind him makes a delightful bit of colour. St. Augustine and St. Ambrose are depicted in the spandrels above, and at the top Christ, a figure with little dignity or significance, is seen rising from the tomb. The work has no religious sentiment; the subject is merely conventional, and the artist seeks in it to represent the effects of light in which he is interested, and which he carries to the point of weirdness, as in the head of St. Ambrose, silhouetted against a mysterious red light, while a round opening in the darkness of the chamber shows a moonlit space of sky with white clouds in it. Dosso shows his poetic feeling for landscape in the quiet luminous spaces, so refreshing to the eye after the crowded interest of the rest of the picture, behind the Madonna's throne, where, beyond scenes of trees and buildings, far-off hills melt into the warm gold of the sky.

In the first room, which we passed through before

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without stopping, there are pictures by Carpi and Bastianino and the later Ferrarese, among them some good portraits by Scarsellino, a late sixteenth century painter of considerable power.<sup>1</sup>

A fine collection of pictures, chiefly of the Ferrarese school, is contained in the Palazzo Santini. Permission to see them may be obtained from Signor Santini. In a room downstairs, two full-length figures of courtiers, by Dosso, are shown, said to have been part of the decoration of the palace of Belriguardo, and some charming "putti" in chiaroscuro by the same artist, as well as some half-length figures of saints, by Carpi, once in S. Giorgio. There are two or three rooms upstairs filled with interesting pictures, among which the following are the most important. A Saint, by Cosimo Tura.—This fine picture depicts the full-length figure of a friar, with a lily in his hand, wearing the three knotted girdle of the Franciscans, and evidently St. Anthony of Padua, though catalogued as S. Giacomo della Marca. The figure is painted in chiaroscuro and stands against a portico of red marble. Tura has expressed with all his deep insight and extraordinary vigour the character of the ascetic follower of Francesco d'Assisi, worn by the sorrow of his love and pity, in the impressive countenance with its marked lines, protruding cheek bones and fleshless contours. The picture is very characteristic of the master, though the drapery is less tormented than usual. Here are the fine expressive hands, the curiously bent, knobbly toes he always paints. A head of Sta. Caterina.—Attributed by Signor Venturi to Tura, but hardly worthy of him. The Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Circumcision, by Mazzolino.—Three predella pictures, adorable little compositions, graceful and delicate in drawing, full of charming

<sup>1</sup> See note at end of book.

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details in the architectural and landscape surroundings, and exquisite in their colouring, which is cooler and more subtle than is this painter's wont. A small half-length figure of a warrior saint, by Ercole Roberti.—Very rich and glowing in colour, the only work of this artist's left in Ferrara. The Death of the Virgin by Coltellini.—This picture, which is signed, is a very charming example of this painter—full of character, and showing the rich Ferrarese sense of colour. The Madonna and Child, with Saints, by the same artist, and also signed.—A larger work in which the figures are somewhat sentimental and affected. The Crucifixion, by Timoteo Viti.—A little picture, showing the Umbrian suavity of style. A Holy Family, by Baldassarre d'Este.—Very interesting as an example of this rare painter, if the attribution may be trusted. The Madonna and Child, by an unknown follower of Tura's, who has an exaggerated and unprepossessing manner. His hand has been recognised in other works in Ferrara, notably in the frescoes of the Schifanoia palace. The Pietà, by Ercole Grandi, completed by Bastianino later.—The head and body of the Christ, the Madonna, St. John the Evangelist, and the landscape background in this picture are the work of Ercole Grandi, the rest by the later painter. St. John is portrayed with the aspect of a young courtier of the period. The Madonna and Child, by l'Ortolano, which charms by its quiet and dreamy sentiment. Another large work by the same artist. The Madonna and Child, by Girolamo della Croce, a Lombard painter.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Palazzo Schifanoia*

CLOSE to the green fringe which skirts the city, in a deserted grass-grown street, stands this old summer palace of the Estensi, with its memories of the golden days of Ferrara.

The palace was built at the end of the fourteenth century by the Marquis Alberto, who intended it as a retreat from the cares of state, and named it Schifanoia, which signifies literally "Shun Care." But he only finished the ground floor and left his pleasure-house to be completed and enjoyed by others. Niccolò III. lodged the Despot of Morea in it in 1438, when the Council of the Churches met in Ferrara, but the building was not continued till Borso took it in hand, added a second storey, adorned it with frescoes and made beautiful "delizie" around. Ercole I. gave the palace in 1471 to his brother Alberto, who had given him loyal aid in securing the dukedom. Alberto was the most beautiful and generous of all Ercole's kinsmen, and was so much beloved by the people that the Duke grew jealous, or, as the chronicler, Ugo Caleffini, puts it, the devil breathed between the brothers, and in 1474 he was deprived of all his possessions and honours and banished to Naples on some slight pretext. Ercole resumed possession of Schifanoia and often retired thither with the Duchess during the heat of summer. Alfonso I. was born here in the July of 1476. Among all the palaces of the city it was the



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most beautiful and delightful, and the Duke always chose to lodge his noblest guests in it. Lodovico il Moro, with his brothers the Duke of Bari and Ascanio Sforza, were housed here in 1477 when exiled from Milan by their sister-in-law the Duchess Bona, Regent for the young Duke, Gian Galeazzo. Ercole feasted them on the June evenings beneath the loggia of the palace, while the two blind poets of Ferrara, Giovanni and Francesco, sang their praises by turns upon the lyre. The palace passed after Ercole's death to his youngest son, Sigismondo, and later to Francesco d'Este, son of Alfonso I. Endless were the feasts which took place there in the time of the pleasure-loving Don Francesco, by whom it was bequeathed to his daughter Marfisa. From 1582 to 1590 it was inhabited by Giulio Thiene, Count of Scandiano, and his wife, that consummate Court lady and beauty, Leonora San Vitale, whose praises Tasso sang and whom Goethe has celebrated in his drama of the unhappy poet.

After Ferrara lost her Dukes, the palace went through many vicissitudes, falling ever more and more into decay. For a long time it was used as a tobacco factory. It is now in the hands of the Municipality, and of late years has been used to house the Archæological Museum of Ferrara, together with a collection of beautiful miniatures belonging to the Communal Library. But its chief interest lies in its famous frescoes.

The exterior of the palace has now little of its old ornamentation left except the beautiful Renaissance doorway, which remains fortunately unspoilt. Time has only lent it an extra charm by mellowing the colour of the marble to a warm golden hue. This stately entrance is adorned with bas-reliefs of pure and exquisite taste, into which a variety of creatures are

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wrought, conspicuous among them Borso's Unicorn dipping its horn into water, with vases, foliage and fruits; and charming "putti," one of whom plays a lute. The ornament round the doorway itself is very suggestive of the style of Francesco Cossa, who may perhaps have supplied the design. The upper part is in much stronger relief, and of bolder design, with rich garlands of fruits, from which is suspended the great shield of Este, with the arms now scraped out and only just traceable. Duke Borso's Unicorn crowns the whole and serves to date the work. The elaborate terra-cotta cornice of the façade is of Ercole I.'s time; his Diamond is worked into the design.

The smaller portal further along belonged originally to the convent of S. Domenico.

The walls of the great hall on the first floor were once entirely covered with frescoes. At the end of the seventeenth century these were overspread with whitewash and lay hidden and forgotten by all but a few antiquaries. In 1840, after several attempts had been made to disinter them, the whitewash was at last removed, but the skill of the operator could not avail to save the paintings of the south and west walls, which came away almost entirely with the whitewash. The others fortunately emerged from their winding sheet, those of the north wall much damaged, but the eastern series in remarkably good preservation.

The central idea of the cycle is the celebration of Duke Borso's life and actions, and the accompanying emblematic representations were probably suggested to the artists by one of the humanists of the Court, imbued with the curious half mystic, half pagan learning of the day, perhaps by the famous scholar and astrologer, Pietro Bono Avogario, whom both

Borso and Ercole greatly favoured and who was more learned than any other in the lore of the heavens. The significance is not always very clear and the interpretation can only be conjectured. An inscription, now completely indecipherable, upon a tablet suspended against the pilaster which divides March and April, may have once given an explanation, and also perhaps a clue to the identity of the personages in the lower scenes, all doubtless portraits of the nobles and men of letters of Borso's Court. It is now impossible to put names to any of them, except to the Duke himself and to one or two others conjecturally, and a most interesting historical record is thus lost to us.

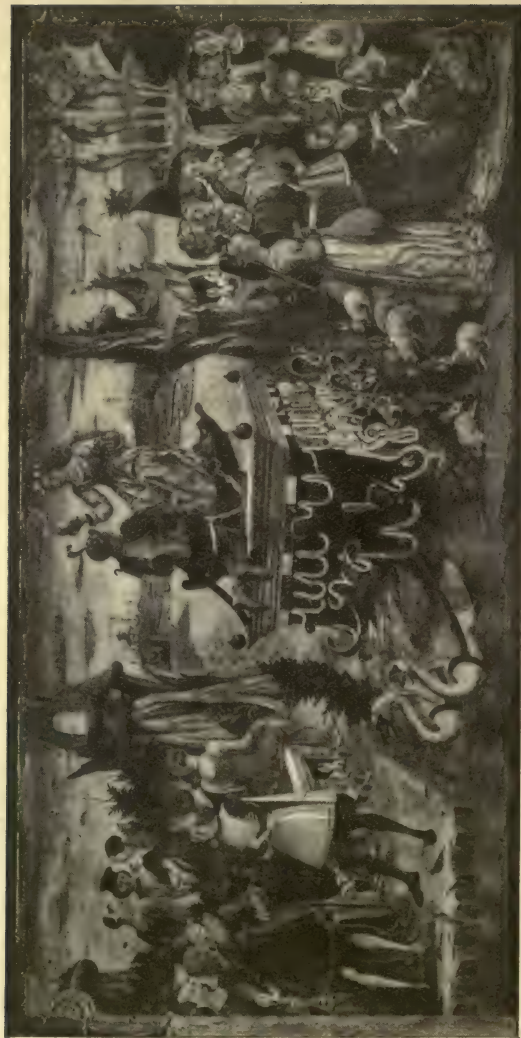
The frescoes are divided into compartments, each representing a month of the year, and consisting of three parts, one above the other. At the top appears the deity appropriate to the month, surrounded by votaries; in the zone beneath, the Sign of the Zodiac, and below, scenes of Duke Borso's daily life. January and February, which were on the south wall, are among the paintings that have perished. On the east wall are March, April and May; on the north, June, July, August and September, and a fragment of December is visible on the west wall.

We must begin with the first compartment of the east wall.

March.—Minerva, goddess of the month of cold and vigorous virtue, presides here. She rides upon a triumphal car drawn by two unicorns. On her left a company of women is depicted, some engaged in needlework, others looking on, all arrayed in the fashion of 1469; their foreheads shaved, their hair drawn up high from their necks, their dresses cut low, back and front. On the right a group of scholars is seen reading and discoursing together, and behind, a







*To face p. 333.*

TRIUMPH OF VENUS, BY FRANCESCO COZZA (PALAZZO SCHIFANOIA).

[Anderson, Rome.]

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green landscape is crossed by streams and broken by strange sharp rocks and buildings set on little eminences. In the zone below, the pensive Spirit of the Month floats over the zodiacal sign, the Ram. On the right is a young man's figure, symbolic probably of noble Industry, while the ragged rope-bound "villanello" on the left stands for servile Idleness. Below appears Duke Borso in splendid array, surrounded by his nobles and listening to the suit of a poor man, while others press behind with their grievances. In this and the other Court scenes a young gallant, magnificently dressed and plainly the same personage in all of them, appears close to the Duke, and is supposed to represent his favourite, Teofilo Calcagnini, on whom he heaped gifts of lands and palaces. Further on, the prince is riding to the chase, his falcon on his wrist, his gentlemen, pages and falconers around him. Incidents of the hunt are depicted. A young man reining back his horse as he flings the hawk from his wrist, a falconer decoying ducks, and in the background peasants pruning vines, hounds pursuing a hare, the Duke again with his cluster of cavaliers in full chase, amid a landscape curiously diversified with cliffs, rocky edges, and fragments of buildings. Through an archway appears in the distance a river, with a bridge across it and a city beyond, evidently Ferrara.

April.—The month of Venus, the season of the renewal of life, the reincarnation of vital forces by means of love. The goddess is drawn in her triumphal car by swans, through a gateway of rocks, towards the world of man. She holds a flower in one hand, the apple of Paris in the other. A mailed warrior chained to her car kneels before her. Upon the shore on either side youths and maidens stand or sit in a green flowery mead among pomegranate bushes, wooing and discours-

ing together with music and song. Rabbits, emblems of fertility, scamper fearlessly in and out at their feet, and on the goddess's left the Three Graces stand upon a rock, their arms entwined, presiding over the lovers' joys. In the zodiacal zone appears the Bull, and over it the nude figure of April, holding the great key with which he has opened the gate of earth's wintry prison. The beautiful figure of a mother with long rich hair, who looks down upon a child, symbolises Maternal Love, and the man on the other side with the tusks of a boar, holding in one hand a winged serpent and in the other a javelin, represents Vice. These figures embody the good and evil influences of the month respectively.

In the scene below we see Duke Borso smiling and bestowing money upon his favourite buffoon Scocola, the hideous deformed little person before him being always identified with that "*soavissimo istrione*," whose jests and tricks were the diversion of his master and the Court. The poor merry Scocola was always in debt, and all his clothes in pawn to the "*barbarian Jews*," and he is represented here in the characteristic act of begging of his "*gossip*" with the privileged audacity of the fool. Further along, Borso is seen returning from the chase. A young gallant sits in the foreground, caressing a falcon. Most of this scene, which was continued over a door leading into the next room has been destroyed, the door having been removed and the opening walled up in the eighteenth century. A strip running above has fortunately escaped. It represents the races which used to take place in Ferrara on St. George's Day, and Borso and his nobles looking on from beneath stately porticoes, while ladies with wonderful head-dresses are seated in the balconies above.

May.—Over May presides the crowned Apollo

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holding his bow in one hand, a sphere in the other, upon a car drawn by four horses, which Aurora, seated in front, is guiding. A crowd of poets and a host of naked children (symbolising the poet's inventions perhaps) appear on either side, and in the background are seen the Nine Muses and the winged horse Pegasus reposing beside the font of Helicon. Above the poets are four hawks upon a perch, the bird sacred to the sun god, because of its keen sight.

In the middle zone appears the Constellation of the Twins. A man above is playing on a pipe to another who kneels with arms folded, absorbed in listening. On one side a youth kneeling in humble attitude, listening to the precepts of a personage in noble garb, suggests the subjection to discipline necessary in a neophyte of the fine arts, and the man with bow, arrows and quiver on the other, perhaps represents the power of the full grown child of Apollo.

The scenes below were destroyed, like those in the last compartment, in the eighteenth century, when the wall was pierced to make a new doorway. Baruffaldi, writing in 1706, says that here Borso was receiving an offering of the first cherries of the season from a peasant. Fragments remaining show episodes of country life, contadini mowing, a peasant driving a pack-ass over a bridge, a man on horseback, etc.

We now come to the north wall. The group of men-at-arms, with lances and pennons, portrayed in the first corner, seem an independent fragment not belonging to the cycle of the months. Instead of a landscape background they are seen against a deep blue curtain embroidered with flowers.

June.—Mercury, god of Industry and Commerce, rules this month. Holding his winged staff entwined with serpents, he rides upon a car drawn by eagles.



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Around are the booths of shoemakers and merchants of various wares, who stand in groups bargaining together. A young gallant is seen haggling for a pair of boots with the shoemaker. A grandly-dressed courtier is offering jewels in pawn. In the background the decapitated Argus lies on a hill, his head beside him. His herds graze peacefully behind, and on the other side are shepherds piping. A dog, a wolf and a monkey also appear in the landscape, which is broken by rocks and trees.

The Crab is the sign of the month. Above it is seated a woman, usually interpreted as Justice, pronouncing sentence on the human soul in the form of a little figure suspended in the air before her. Or perhaps the spirit of Commerce tyrannising over humanity? She is attended by Fraud, depicted as a human monster with the feet of a griffin, and fighting with a dragon; and by a dolorous figure of Folly stripped by the sharpers of commerce of all but a fragment of shirt which he has supplemented by leaves for a covering, a suggestive return to Nature. Below we see Borso again coming from the chase, and on the right he stands and receives a suppliant or it may be a person offering a gift. In the background beyond a river we see "villani" reaping, and laden harvest wains drawn by oxen, peasant women carrying burdens, and further away a company of soldiers approaching a castle.

July.—The month of power and fruition, governed by Jove. The god rides upon a car drawn by two lions and holds a thunderbolt in his hand. Cybele sits back to back with him, a turreted crown upon her head, a sceptre in her right hand. Shields upheld by cupids decorate the car. On one side a marriage is going on, and on the other is seen a troop of priests with musical instruments, followed by a band of

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warriors. A convent with monks about it is depicted in the background.

Over the sign of the Lion in the middle zone appears a man with a bow and arrow, the symbol of Power. The horrible individual gnawing a piece of raw flesh, torn from some animal's shank, which he clutches in his left hand, stands for Gluttony. The meaning of the strange figure, on the other side, seated in a tree and attended by a dog and a dove, is difficult to understand; it seems to signify Moderation of Appetite.

In the lowest divisions the Duke is conversing with his courtiers and a steward presents a document to him. He next appears riding, and the landscape unrolls itself beyond an archway, above which are seen distant scenes. On the portion of the wall level with the window Borso and his courtiers are seen passing by on horseback, and watching the peasants gleaning in the fields of corn and hemp.

August.—Ceres, goddess of this fruitful month, holds a sheaf of wheat ears in her hand. Her car is drawn by dragons and putti ride upon its edge blowing long pipes. On one side a contadino leads forward a yoke of oxen, and on the other peasants are unloading sacks of grain from a waggon under the shelter of a shed, while merchants converse beside them. Behind are depicted the labours of the fields, a peasant ploughing with oxen, another scattering the seed, and in the distance on our right Pluto is seen carrying away Proserpina in his car over the sea.

The Virgin stretched upon the Sun is the sign of the zodiac. Above hovers a figure with a tablet and a style in her hands; she is thought to symbolise Calculation. The woman with long golden hair holding in her right hand a pomegranate, and in her left a sheaf of wheat ears, is said to mean Providence, and she

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who kneels with her hands clasped, Prayer or Gratitude. Borso below receives an envoy from Bologna, and further on is riding forth with his Court, accompanied by hounds and hawks, to one of his villas in the country. A team of six horses treading out the corn upon a threshing floor is seen in the background, while peasants toss the sheaves under their hoofs. In the distance appears a porticoed castle with Gothic windows, and a machicolated tower (perhaps the famous Belriguardo), and horsemen making their way towards it.

September.—A woman's figure, thought to signify Concupiscence, takes the place of the deity of the month. Four monkeys draw her car, and others are crouched on its corners. To her left Mars and Venus are sleeping, with a circle of grotesque little loves dancing on a rock above them. On the opposite side the industrious one-eyed Cyclops are forging armour in the workshop of Vulcan. Neat suits of finished armour hang on a pole above them, and to a pilaster is suspended a shield bearing the device of the city of Rome, the Wolf suckling the Twins.

Over the sign of the Scales below, the floating figure with draperies flying out and hands uplifted probably stands for Chastity. On her left an archer shoots at a nude man who represents Licentiousness, and on her right a man blowing a trumpet and holding another trumpet in his other hand, with a dead bird hanging to it, should signify Loyalty.

Lastly, Duke Borso gives audience to an ambassador of the Venetian Republic. The portico beneath which he stands is adorned with an interesting presentment of a bas-relief, almost effaced; the subject is the Scourging of Christ and Peter vociferating his denial to the maid-servant. The Duke goes forth to

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the chase with his courtiers amid the scenes of the Vendemmia. Peasants are seen gathering the grapes, others treading them in the vats.

The remains of the upper zone of December, still distinguishable on the west wall, show the triumph of a goddess, with a mass of flames around her head. Her car, upon which is painted Borso's emblem, the "Paraduro," is accompanied by a throng of graceful maidens, and a large suave landscape opens out behind, with low blue hills far away.

Upon the south wall traces remain of buildings and figures; a duel between knights is seen through a gateway opening into a cortile, and some heads of cavaliers, which still retain vestiges of colour, are in the extreme corner to the east.

The authorship and date of these frescoes were much debated questions till Signor Venturi's discovery of a letter from Francesco Cossa to Borso (in the ducal archives at Modena) proved that this apotheosis of himself was carried out by Duke Borso's own order and during his life time—about 1469—and that Cossa was the painter of the east wall. It was the custom to set one artist to appraise the value of another's work, and fix the payment. The frescoes of Schifanoia had been valued at ten bolognini the foot all alike. Cossa's letter is a protest against the valuation of his part of the work at the same price as the rest. After saying that some of the artists may well be content, and are too well paid at the price, he humbly begs to remind the Duke "that I am Francesco del Cossa who alone have done the three spaces there against the ante-chamber" (the Sala de' Stucchi), and if it was only the losing forty or fifty ducats, which he must do if only paid the ten bolognini, he would nevertheless be content, though he has to live by the work of his hands, but it is because of other circumstances that he



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is so grieved and wounded, and chiefly by reason that he who had begun to have some name should be treated and judged and put on a level with the meanest apprentice in Ferrara, and his diligent and continuous study should have won him no greater appreciation from his Illustrious Lordship. He reminds the Duke that he had adorned his work with gold and with good colours, and asks that an addition to the estimated price should be bestowed upon him as a gracious gift.

But the artist was answered by two dry lines, bidding him be content with the ten bolognini. This want of judgment lost the Duke a fine artist. Cossa abandoned his native city in disgust and settled at Bologna. We learn that Baldasarre d'Este was commissioned to retouch many of the heads in the Schifanoia frescoes, an additional insult which may have helped to drive Cossa from Ferrara.

A comparison of his work with the rest of the frescoes shows his complaint to have been justified. The eastern series is by far the finest part of the decoration, and Cossa's assertion of the superiority of his materials is supported by the resistance of the work to the ravages of time and whitewash. The composition is clear, simple and harmonious, and skilfully arranged to bring out the significance of the subject. The division of the wall into three parts, sub-divided again into three, is carried on in the graceful triple arrangement of the groups in the two upper zones of each month. The car of the deity and the sign of the zodiac make the centre of the composition in each and give the keynote of the symbolism. The groups and single figures flanking them illustrate the idea and those above correspond in meaning with those below. The clear rich colour is admirably decorative. The somewhat angular forms and homely types, the flutter-

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ing draperies with complicated folds, the strangely split rocks in the background, the classical architecture adorned with reliefs and rich ornamentation, reveal the kinship of the artist to Cosimo Tura and his school. But the influence of Piero della Francesca is also apparent. The ladies looking on in the upper zone of March, with their tall forms and stately swelling robes, strongly suggest that artist. There is, moreover, in the whole work a sweet and tranquil pensiveness, a certain idealism and feeling of aloofness, dignifying the realistic details, and distinguishing it from the work of the older Ferrarese master.

The Triumph of Love in the upper zone of April is the most attractive part of the whole series. The artist shows a charming simplicity in this picture of Venus in the form of a fine lady of the fifteenth century. The ladies in the groups on either side of her car have an exquisite grace and charm. Their cavaliers of the long curls and gay costumes match them, and all the details of flowers, birds and little beasts, the fleecy little clouds in the blue sky, which seem to be composed of Venus's doves, express the jocund month of love and roses. The scene is full of an innocent frankness which well expresses the spirit of the early Renaissance, that moment of delight unclouded by fear or doubt.

In the corresponding part of March a charming discretion rules the groups that own the sway of the prudent Minerva. There is not so much variety of character in the women here as in April. An accomplished pupil may have assisted Cossa in painting them, and the group of learned men is assigned by critics to a scholar.

The figures of the zodiacal zones are very striking and beautiful, especially in March and April. They stand out grave and significant, strongly marked upon

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the background as if to impress an admonition upon the spectator. In spite of realistic treatment they express a pensive mysticism which gives them an abstract and symbolic effect.

The quiet emphasis of these emblematic personages, summing up the significance of the groups, is interposed with admirable effect between the lively movements of the top and bottom zones. These last are full of character and variety. The portraits of Duke Borso wearing a smile of pompous benevolence exactly express the character of the kindly old tyrant of history, and the other heads are very strong and characteristic and show a remarkable power of portraiture. The group of two men and a woman seen through an archway in the riding scene of the first fresco is specially striking. The same three appear in the next scene beneath the portico where Borso is condescending to Scocola. The lady has her eyes down in this, and her pensive face is very attractive. She is the only woman in these groups, which leads one to suppose that ladies were not so much in evidence at the Court of Ferrara in the days of the bachelor Borso as in those of Leonello before, or Ercole after him.

Almost more interesting than these courtly figures are the little episodes of common life interposed among them. The action of the peasants pruning vines in March is very vigorously expressed, and the movement of the figures in the races in April is rendered with extraordinary realism and vivacity. This small scene has been judged by M. Harck and M. Venturi to be the most remarkable piece of work in the whole cycle.

The frescoes of the north wall belong to the school of Cosimo Tura, though no part of them is now attributed, except possibly one or two details, to the master himself. The confused, broken composition and the feebleness of much of the draw-



RIDING TO THE CHASE, DETAIL OF FRESCO BY FRANCESCO COZZA  
(PALAZZO SCHIFANOIA).

[Anderson, Rome.





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ing distinguish them unfavourably from the eastern series. The colour is so much spoilt that it is impossible to judge of it as a whole. June and the upper portion of July are much inferior to the rest. They are considered to be by the hand of an unknown pupil of Tura's, whose manner is a caricature of the master's, but is penetrated nevertheless by a certain artless individuality of his own. His drawing is almost childish in places, his personages painfully ugly, with large staring eyes, angular and wooden forms, and dark reddish skins clothing their bony faces. The Borso scenes in July (except the corner by the window) are, however, by a more accomplished artist, and their likeness in character to those of the eastern wall has caused critics to assign them to Cossa. Here is the same pompous prince, the same gallant with the long legs whom we have called Teofilo Calcagnini in the other frescoes, the same attitudes, the same style of architectural decoration.

The upper zone of August is probably the work of the unknown artist of the last two months. But the zodiacal zone of June and the rest of August and September show a different hand, of much greater vigour and capacity. The curiously muscular figures, with very small waists and prominent hips and calves, full of energy and movement, as well as the elaborate architectural details and rocky landscapes, are very much in Tura's manner, and some bits, as the woman praying and the group of Cyclops, are so ably drawn that they have been attributed to Tura himself. But they are now generally allowed not to be worthy of that great artist, and he is known to have been occupied with the frescoes of the chapel at Belriguardo at the time they were painted.

The lower divisions of these months, especially of September, are now little distinguishable, but none of

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the heads representing the Duke show anything approaching the talent for portraiture which Cossa's do. They are without distinction or expression. But we have to remember that Baldassarre d'Este "touched up" many of the heads in these frescoes.

The fragment of December on the west wall must have been painted after 1493, when that and the southern side of the room were blown in by a great gale. The ease and naturalness of the young girls in it, the graceful folds of the draperies, the suave landscape closed in by far-off mountains and the transparent colour show, says M. Harck, a different artistic generation, and recall Costa.

Apart from their artistic merit, this famous cycle of frescoes has all the charm and thrilling interest of a historical picture book. We see the stately picturesque life of the fifteenth century before our eyes, surrounded with the pastoral and romantic atmosphere of a Boiadesque poem. And the personality of Duke Borso is depicted as it could only be by a contemporary hand unconscious of its irony. We see him the centre of his universe, surrounded by the adulation of his Court and the servile industry of his poorer subjects, posing as the father of his people with a naïve self-satisfaction and good humour which make him with all his vanity almost lovable. We see the labours of the peasants, the sport of the citizens, the whole flow and ebb of daily life in Ferrara. And above are embodied the thoughts and ideas which influenced that thrilling moment, the pagan images with which the revival of ancient literature had filled men's minds, combined with the old mystic medieval notions of starry influences, which the new spirit of curiosity and doubt had quickened into a still more lively superstition.

The choice of the subjects is significant of the

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changing ideals of the time. The old childlike faith and humility was being replaced by a new sentiment of the importance of man in the world. Instead of the meek Mary and her Child, Borso invokes the heathen deities to preside over his existence, and rather than represent the gesta of the Christian demigods, he prefers to glorify man in his own person and uphold with classic pride his own virtues as an example to posterity.

The books in the cases along the walls are splendid examples of Ferrarese miniature in the fifteenth century. This art was greatly encouraged by the Marquis Leonello, who employed a number of Tuscan and Flemish miniaturists. Famous among them was Zorzo di Alemagna, who introduced the extreme fineness of manipulation of the German style. This influence, combined with the grace learned from the Tuscans, produced a native school of miniaturists which arrived at great excellence in the time of Borso. Their style of ornamentation, enriched with animals and symbols, distinguishes their work, says Signor Venturi, from the miniatures of other parts of Italy. Their colour also has great individuality. The beautiful *Coralì* of the Cathedral, which we have already seen, have much in common with the Schifanoia books. These originally belonged to the Certosa and to the monasteries of San Giorgio and of the Cistercians outside the walls. The greatest treasure is a magnificent copy of the *Decretum Gratiani*, on parchment, printed at Padua in 1474 and adorned with exquisitely miniatures pictures and initial letters. The first page depicts the presentation of the book to Pope Sixtus IV., and in the rich border at the bottom appears the shield of Lorenzo Roverella. The rest of the miniatures illustrate different cases dealt with in this digest of the canon law.



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Each is a complete picture, exquisitely finished in every detail of costume and ornamentation and landscape. The figures are drawn with extreme fineness and are full of animation and movement, and the colour is very brilliant and enamel-like. The initial letters of floral design are splendidly rich and varied. The unknown artists show their Ferrarese character in the drawing and colour and in details, such as the introduction of Renaissance architecture and bas-reliefs of gladiators fighting, richly carved capitals, etc. Two or three different hands appear in the work. An artist superior to the rest has done the beautiful first page, and to him Signor Venturi gives Nos. 6, 10 and 18. His work may be detected by a surer touch, clearer and better colour, and smoother manipulation. As a representation of the life of the fifteenth century this work has been called the most precious gem in Europe.

The splendid Bible, in four volumes, was transcribed by Fra Matteo da Alexandria between 1469 and 1476, and the artists were probably Guglielmo and Alessandro Giraldi. The sign of the Certosini, formed of a C and a Cross, appears in the ornamentation. The first volume only (in the case next to the *Decretum*) was finished in Borso's time; his emblems appear in the medallions in the borders. It has a very beautiful title-page enriched with all the exuberant Ferrarese fancy. The sacred subjects are surrounded with the gambols of nude "putti," and with architectural details, rich garlands and cornucopia of fruit and flowers. There are a number of other illustrations in the volume. The remaining volumes were finished in the reign of Ercole I., whose emblems, the Diamond, the Columns of Hercules and the ducal arms with the Papal keys included, are wrought into the borders. A page usually ex-

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posed shows Jeremiah in prison, sitting with head on hands; the ornamentation is extraordinarily rich in colour and design—cupids, stags, hinds, a peacock and other creatures are seen playing about in an exquisite landscape with a fountain crowned by Borso's Unicorn. The rest of the books are *Corali*, of which there are two series. The eighteen larger volumes, all from the Certosa, were printed with wooden types and illuminated in 1468. Each page of these costly productions is formed of the skin of an unborn calf. The exquisitely finished pictures are remarkable for their large spacious composition and dignity of expression, clearness and delicacy of colour, and the ornamental patterns are extremely rich. The series of smaller books, some of which show the arms of the Olivetani, belonging to San Giorgio are earlier in date. The name of the miniaturist, Giuniforte Vicomercato of Milan, and the date 1449 is inscribed in Vol. N in the midst of the fine meandering decoration of an A, in the page usually exposed. The miniatures, though more archaic in style than in the larger series, are very beautiful, and express a great earnestness and simplicity. They appear to be by different hands.

The stucco decoration of the ornate chamber opening out of the large room is the work of Domenico Paris of Padua. Bongiovanni di Geminiano painted the reliefs with "*colores bonos et sufficientes*," in the words of his contract. His work has now been restored with colours and gilding, more than "*sufficient*." The ornamentation is very elaborate and heavy, but the slender figures of the Virtues, seated in niches between the panels, and of the winged putti, are moulded with grace and delicacy. The shield of the Estensi, surrounded by the various devices of Duke Borso, is the central motive of the

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decoration upon the gorgeous ceiling and walls. The ceiling of the inner room is charmingly decorated, in a more restrained style. These two rooms contain the collection of antiquities and artistic objects. In the case under the first window in the inner room are some very beautiful examples of medals by Pisanello. It was at Ferrara that the Veronese artist began the practice of this antique art, which had been lately revived and which he brought to very great excellence. Pisanello's portrait medals are full of animation and character, and his conception of his subjects very noble and dignified. The Niccolò III. here is attributed to him and would be one of his earliest productions of this kind, but the authorship is not undoubted. It is in any case a very characteristic head. The six medals of Leonello are some of Pisanello's most famous works. The artist, evidently rejoicing in his subject, has portrayed with an exquisite distinction the beautiful finely-cut profile of the poet prince with its retreating brow. All the sensibility of a seer of the beautiful appears in it. The curious elongated cranium is very noticeable in these portraits. The large one was cast on the occasion of the prince's marriage with Maria of Aragon, and the inscription GE · R · AR. signifies his relation of son-in-law to Aragon. Upon the reverse is a lion, with a cupid holding a scroll unrolled before him, and Leonello's device of a Sail and the date 1444 above. A very beautiful figure of a nude man crouched at the foot of a rock is on the back of another of Leonello. Another has a curious triple face on the reverse, another a lynx with eyes bound. The allegorical significance of these reverses is obscure and often far fetched. Duke Borso is the subject of a medal by Jacopo Lixognolo, which has on the back the Unicorn seated amid insurmountable rocks and the rays of the

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sun appearing above. This is thought to represent Prudence situated amongst the obstacles of life, which can only be overcome by the divine aid, symbolised by the rays of the sun. A finer one of Borso is by Petrecini of Florence and was done in 1460. It gives the same pompous visage with retreating double chin of the frescoes, but it is a younger and more refined version than Cossa's. One of Ercole I. by Baldassarre d'Este has on the reverse an open book with three eyes above it, supposed to signify Vigilance applied to past, present and future. Corradini is the artist of the other two medals of this Duke. A strong resemblance is noticeable in these princes to one another and to their father Niccolò III. Rinaldo d'Este, another brother, is portrayed with a very attractive face, on a medallion attributed to Corradini, and Sigismondo d'Este is the subject of one by Sperandio, who worked a great deal in Ferrara. A charming little presentment of Isabella d'Este at about the age of thirty-two, with hair knotted behind her head and floating in ends—a winged Victory on the reverse—is by Gian Cristoforo Romano, who was celebrated as goldsmith, sculptor and architect as well as medallist. Alfonso I. appears on a medal made from the bronze of a cannon which he fused with his own hand. Another shows him young, with short curls under a wide cap. In later ones he is bearded and has a somewhat morose countenance. One of the most interesting is the medal of Lucrezia Borgia, which is almost the only undoubted portrait of that strange and fascinating woman. She is by no means regularly beautiful, the nose is large, the forehead round, the chin retreating, but the medal well suggests her wonderful charm of mobility and expression. The artist's identity is unknown; he is called the Medallist of the Captive Love, for upon the reverse he has depicted with



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exquisite grace a baby cupid blindfolded and with wings in disorder bound with hands behind his back to a laurel. Above his head his broken quiver and other weapons hang to a tree. Cardinal Ippolito I., Ercole II., Alfonso II., and Barbara of Austria, Luigi d'Este, and Leanora, the princess whose name legend couples with Tasso's, are all represented here, and among the other portraits is one by the Ferrarese medallist Marescotti of the Beato Giovanni da Tossignano, Bishop of Ferrara in the first half of the fifteenth century, and famous for his humility and holy life, and one of Boiardo with a bearded face, and a reverse showing Vulcan at his forge, with Venus and Cupid and the legend *Amor vincit omnia*. The fine head of Ariosto is represented twice. Prisciano Prisciani, a great minister of Borso's, Bart. Pendaglia and Lod. Carbone are portrayed by Sperandio and the poet Tebaldeo by Pastorini. There are other examples of Pisanello and most of these medallists, in the other cases, as well as decorations, seals, metal ornaments for armour, etc., worked by excellent artists, and a very interesting collection of Ferrarese coins from the twelfth century to the extinction of the mint. The sculptured alabaster altarpiece in the inner room is of considerable interest. It is supposed to be German work of the thirteenth century, but is really English. It belongs to the Nottingham school of sculpture of the late fifteenth century, which used alabaster quarried at Cheddleton in Staffordshire. This piece is the more important as examples of this work are now very rare; there is little left in England, but we have a few specimens in the British and Kensington Museums. The Crucifixion is the central subject here, with the Betrayal, the Scourging, and the Journey to Calvary on one side, and the Descent from the Cross, the Entombment, and the Resurrection on the other.

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The workmanship is archaic; the heads ugly and somewhat grotesque; the figures very long and attenuated. It was originally coloured, and was formerly in the chapel built by Ercole I. in the ducal Cortile and afterwards in St. Andrea. It is pleasant to find that an English production had an honoured place in such a home of art as Ferrara of the Cinquecento, though the work in question perhaps illustrates the love of the Dukes for curiosities rather than their appreciation of the beautiful.

Here are also preserved the "rostri" of the Venetian ships captured at the Battle of the Polisella in 1509 and long preserved as trophies in the Duomo.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *Palaces, Churches and Streets*

The Seminario—Ospedale di Sant Anna—The Palazzina—Sta. Maria della Consolazione—San Francesco—Casa Romei—Corpus Domini—Casa Savonarola—Sta. Maria in Vado—St. Andrea—St. Appolinare—San Gregorio—Palazzo del Paradiso and Biblioteca.

BEHIND the great modern palace of the Archbishop, which stands in the principal street, on the north side of the Cathedral, is the palace now used as the Seminario, facing into Via Cairoli. This was built in 1444 by Leonello, who gave it to his favourite, Folco da Villafiora. Its present façade is a reconstruction of 1553, and the bust over the great entrance is said to be Ercole II. Within are two rooms with vaulted ceilings, frescoed by Garofalo in 1519. The outer one is almost ruined by decay, but the inner and more important is in fairly good preservation, except that some of the figures of goddesses have been wilfully destroyed. The decoration is very sumptuous. The central composition represents a balcony with people appearing over it, seen against the sky—an idea already used by Mantegna for a ceiling decoration in the Gonzaga palace at Mantua. Around are disposed panels and medallions with biblical, classic and symbolic personages and scenes in monochrome, enclosed within arabesques. Morelli says that "it is difficult to find in all Italy spaces decorated with more intelligence and taste." But the figures have little animation, the colour is cold and heavy, the

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blue of the sky without light or atmosphere. The didactic note struck by the hideous nude figure of an old woman seems out of place, and the whole work lacks the joyous spirit of the best Cinquecento decoration.

The Palazzo Muzzarelli opposite (No. 13) has a picturesque garden court, and a singularly graceful loggia built over it, spoilt, however, by the violent colour with which it is painted.

Passing through the sixteenth-century church of the Teatini, where there is a Purification of the Virgin, by Guercino, in the north transept, you emerge in Via Giovecca (Ferrarese, "Zuecca"), the broadest and finest street in Ferrara, which runs in a direct line from the Castle to the walls. It occupies the place of the old fosse outside the city walls on this side, before the Addizione Erculea was built. The Giovecca was the pride of the citizens in the sixteenth century; they were wont to boast that it was a mile long! Here the Carnival processions and frolics used to take place, led by the Duke and all his Court, when the street was thronged with thousands of maskers, in carriages, on horseback or on foot—a diversion called from the name of the street "andar zueccando."

The Palazzo Roverella, opposite the Teatini, keeps its fine early sixteenth-century façade, remarkable for the unusual but graceful arrangement of the windows and for the beautiful terra-cotta ornamentation. The bulging window, which spoils its symmetrical effect, is an eighteenth-century addition.

Close by is the Hospital of St. Anna, famous for its memories of Tasso. This refuge for the sick was founded in 1444, with the favour of Leonello, by the Beato Giovanni da Tossignano, a very holy Bishop of Ferrara, whose ascetic head, sculptured by Marescotti, may be seen in the vestibule. It is now the chief



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hospital of the city. The building has been many times altered and restored, but the exquisite cloister, on the left of the entrance court, a veritable wonder of grace and colour, with its serried ranks of pillars and gracious arcades enclosing a square grass plot, belongs, with the stuccoed buildings surrounding it, to the best period of the Renaissance. The façade is eighteenth century, and the interior was completely renovated in 1857. Every trace of Tasso's habitation there has been lost. One can but visit the cell, which since about 1800—the legend is no older—has been fixed on as his dungeon, and become a shrine for sentimental pilgrims from all parts of Europe, in the wake of Byron, who celebrates it in lines burning with indignation at the wrong inflicted by a petty tyrant on an immortal poet.

“ . . . When the towers  
And battlements which guard his joyous hours  
Of banquet, dance and revel, are forgot,  
Or left untended in a dull repose,  
This—this—shall be a consecrated spot.”

It is a dreadful stone cavern beneath the present level of the hospital, but not, perhaps, very bad as prisons go—“a very decent dungeon,” Shelley called it—and it is quite possible that, with the others adjoining, it may have been used in less humane times for mad patients, and may actually have housed the unhappy Tasso in the first moments of his captivity. Byron had himself locked in for two hours, and emerged to write the *Lament of Tasso*. His name, which he carved outside, has been torn away by some depredator, all but the first letter.

There are some fine palaces in the Giovecca, but most of them much modernised in aspect. But far down on the right hand, beyond the picturesque garden wall and stately iron gates of the Palazzo



ENTRANCE TO THE HOSPITAL OF ST. ANNA



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Pareschi, stands a one-storied building, upon which decay has set its mark. This is the Palazzina, built by Francesco d'Este in 1559, and inhabited by his daughter Marfisa for many years before her death in 1608. The long, low façade, of classic style, with a pedimented doorway, has a very stately effect, and the interior, now used as a store for hemp and in a deplorably ruinous condition, is deeply interesting as the typical dwelling of a Cinquecento princess. The great door opens straight into a lofty chamber, and all the rooms lead one out of the other without any passages. The ceilings are covered with exquisitely graceful and fantastic arabesques, painted in delicate colours upon a white ground, and showing all the strange unnatural forms, fascinating and repellent at once, with which the imagination of a decadent age loves to play—the soulless fancies, lovely, and yet touched with coarseness, by which art descends from its periods of climax. There was once a loggia at the back, opening on to large gardens, and other large chambers built on at the side, some of which still exist. One, a great hall, with its ceiling coarsely frescoed in imitation of a pergola of vines, with birds amidst the leaves, was used as a theatre.

Beyond the Palazzina the street passes under an ornamental archway, built in the eighteenth century, and ends in a broad flight of steps leading up on to the walls. The solitary tower seen on the left hand is the Campanile of the demolished church of S. Silvestro.

The long Via di Mortara runs from the Giovecca past the great convent (now barracks) and disused church of Sta. Maria di Mortara to Sta. Maria della Consolazione, beside the picturesque Porta Mare. This church, now also secularised, stands in a grassy court, and under the graceful portico there is a fresco



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by Garofalo. The dismantled interior still keeps a fine early sixteenth-century fresco in the ceiling of the apse, the Coronation of the Virgin, a good deal damaged. The forms of the angels, with their various instruments of music, the rich and harmonious, but somewhat hot colouring, above all, the curious bald-headed type of God the Father, suggest Mazzolino as the probable painter. Marfisa d'Este was buried in this church.

Turning to the left along the Corso Mare you reach S. Giovanni Battista (late sixteenth century). Thence turning again to the left, the little closed church of Sta. Monica, standing back in a neglected court, with a fresco by Garofalo over the door, and S. Spirito, a spacious temple in the form of a Greek cross, built early in the seventeenth century from the materials of the destroyed palace of Belvedere. A few steps brings you from here back to the Giovecca.

Via Volta Paletto, which runs parallel to the Giovecca on the south, is full of old brick houses with terra-cotta ornamentation and picturesque chimneys. Some of the moulded door-heads, of rich Renaissance design, with which the city abounds, showing devices of dolphins, tritons, masks, vases with birds drinking from them, are to be seen here. Nos. 9 and 46 are very good examples. The palace with the late sixteenth-century façade adorned with trophies was built by a Bevilacqua in 1430 and restored in its present florid style by Cardinal Aldobrandini Bevilacqua. It belongs at the present day to the Costabili, and contained till lately a splendid library and collection of Ferrarese pictures, some of which are now in the National Gallery.

S. Francesco.—This is one of the most important churches in the city, and enjoyed the special protection and favour of the Estensi. It was first built

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in 1232 and rebuilt in 1341. The Marquises Azzo Novello, Aldobrandino, Niccolò il Zoppo and Alberto, and many other princes of the reigning House, were buried here in the great "arca rossa" of the family, which opened, almost for the last time, to receive the body of Niccolò d'Este, Leonello's son, beheaded by Ercole I. in 1576. Ugo and Parisina were laid in the cemetery outside. All trace of honoured and dishonoured dead alike is now lost. The church in its present form is the work of Biagio Rossetti in 1494, and has been restored since. It is a brick building of large and simple proportions, ornamented outside with pilasters and with a charming terra-cotta frieze in which medallions with the ascetic head of St. Francis are framed in wreaths and upheld by "putti,"



TERRA-COTTA OVER DOORWAY, NO. 46 VIA  
VOLTA PALETTO.

a naïvely incongruous idea, very characteristic of the period. The interior, with its long pillared aisles and cupolaed roof, gives that impression of space which is so satisfying in Italian churches of the Renaissance. The colour of the stone columns and brick floor is very pleasant and reposeful. The monochrome frieze, in the taste of the late sixteenth century, round the nave and transepts, and the half-length figures between the arches are by Carpi. In the first chapel on the north side after entering there is a fresco of the Betrayal of Christ, by Garofalo, with some very good heads in it, and on either side of the altar two fine portraits of the patrons of the chapel, an old

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man and woman of the Massa d'Argenta family, by the same artist. The relief over the altar is a late and poor work, by Cristoforo di Ambrogio. Garofalo has frescoed another chapel on the south side with the Nativity and the Repose of the Holy Family, both of which are graceful compositions and charming in sentiment. The Repose is disfigured by a very bad repainting of the upper part. Upon a pilaster between the sixth and seventh chapels on this side there is a representation of the Scourging, the Christ being a sculptured figure of the fifteenth century, and the scourgers having been painted later by a pupil of Garofalo's. A picture of St. Anthony of Padua, with his lily, Giottesque in character and full of sweetness and simplicity, in the last chapel, is supposed to be by the Beato Donato Brasavola, a Franciscan who died in 1353, but is probably rather later in date.

The now secularised convent was once very rich and great. It had important schools, in which Sixtus V., among others, studied. Tasso was for a short time confined in it when first Alfonso II. thought it necessary to keep him under restraint.

Beyond S. Francesco the street has been renamed Via Savonarola. Many significant memories cling to it. By the corner of Via Praisolo, at the foot of that high blind wall, in which the once stately windows and doors have been long blocked up, lay, one February morning in 1508, the body of the murdered poet, Ercole Strozzi, with its two-and-twenty wounds. Within a little convent church hidden in the precincts behind the wall reposes, quite forgotten, the "mostro crudel," who caused the poet's death, and beside him his wife, Lucrezia Borgia. There the nuns of the Body of the Crucified kneel and worship for ever the Eternal Pain, over all that is left of the golden-haired Venus of the Renaissance. A few paces further along

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the street stands an old brick house, once the Strozzi palace, where Madonna Barbara Torelli awaited her poet's return that day, with his child in her arms, and



CORNER WHERE ERCOLE STROZZI WAS MURDERED.

beside it is the house where Girolamo Savonarola learnt from the stern old physician, his grandfather, to see through the deceitful semblances of the world and whence he gazed out with shuddering and indignant

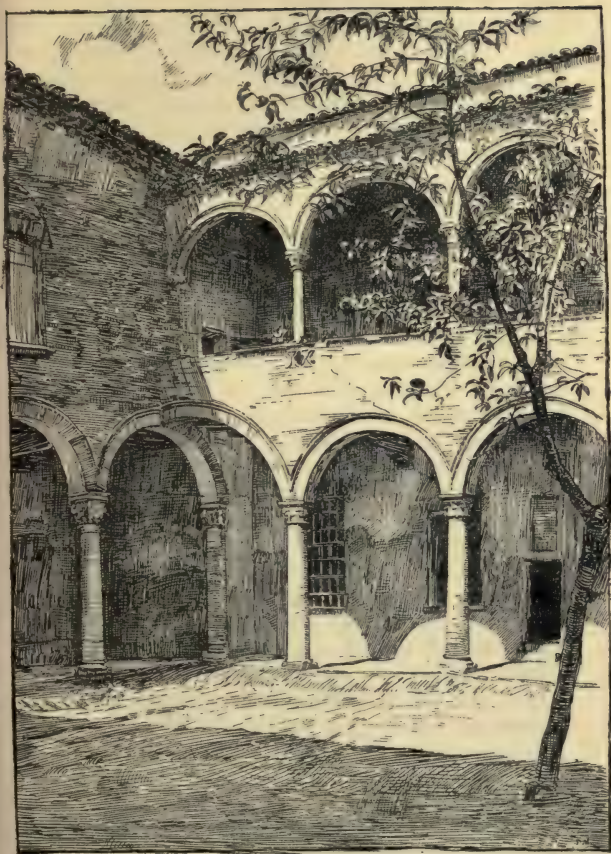


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eyes upon the fair corrupt city, foreseeing the sorrow which waited upon its manifold sins and preparing himself for that different course which, too, was to have a tragic end.

The palace just beyond the church, with the fine arched entrance and vast pillared cortile, opening through grilles of delicate ironwork upon a garden which in May is a wilderness of roses, is the old ducal Palazzo di S. Francesco—now Palazzo Pareschi—built by Ercole I. in 1475-1487. Alfonso I. gave it as a home to the “*infelicissima regina*,” Isabella of Aragon, who was reduced to great poverty after the death of her husband, the dispossessed King Frederick of Naples. She lived there in retirement with her two daughters. For these royal but dowerless maidens no bridegrooms of their own rank were forthcoming, and the lovers of low degree whom they did not fail to find for themselves were ruthlessly chased away by the Duke. Renata of France inhabited the palace during her last years in Ferrara. One may be sure that no lovers made their way over the garden wall for the princesses Lucrezia and Leonora during her tenancy. The household of the Calvinist Duchess was governed by strict discipline, and to serve her she sought for widows of over fifty—she preferred them sixty—of saintly and blameless life, sober in word and conversation, always dressed in black, and who must never even desire to talk to men, except on very rare occasions, in the princess’ presence! Thus she describes their qualifications in a letter to Calvin, asking him to recommend her two suitable persons of the sort.

The palace, which has some fine stuccoed ceilings within, in the rococo style, has been restored in the eighteenth century, but the cortile is the same as in its ducal days. Casa Romei, the palace behind the high



CASA ROMULI



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wall opposite, was built in the fifteenth century, and bequeathed in 1483 by Giovanni Romei to the neighbouring community of Corpus Domini, who joined it to their convent. It is now kept as a public monument. The cortile is surrounded on three sides by porticoes, with an open gallery above, in which the combination of slender stone columns and arches of brick produces a charming effect of colour and lightness. On the fourth side the wall is decorated with medallions of terra-cotta and stucco, showing in the centre the Sacred Monogram, encircled by Seraphim. The palace was at one time possessed by Cardinal Ippolito II., whose arms are emblazoned on the walls. The emblem of the convent also is carved on the well-head and on the capitals, and repeated everywhere in the painted devices on the ceilings of the porticoes. In the great empty chambers there are remains of Cinquecento paintings. Some rooms off the cortile on the west side have ceilings decorated with arabesques, and in a room opposite, which leads through into another very picturesque court, there are half-ruined frescoes of Sybils, with other decorations, and a fine fifteenth-century stone canopy to the chimney-place, ornamented with a delicate terra-cotta moulding. A splendid hall upstairs, occupying the whole of one side of the building, is frescoed with arabesques of extraordinary grace—exquisite classic fancies flowing on in endless repetition and transformation, the perfect decorative art of the decadence, that seeks only to charm the senses. These paintings belong to the middle of the sixteenth century, the period of Cardinal Ippolito, whose arms appear at the end of the room. A set of windows, now blocked up, opened from this chamber into the cloistered precincts of the nuns; other rooms, opening out of one another all round the gallery, are decorated in the



same style. A painting of David and Goliath, in the ceiling of the great chamber inhabited by the custode, shows the weakness and coarseness of the late Ferrarese school.

Lucrezia Borgia, like her mother-in-law, Eleanora of Aragon, greatly loved and favoured the community of Corpus Domini, and used often to retire to meditate and pray among the nuns, especially when any affliction befell her, such as the loss of her father Alexander VI., and later of her brother Cæsar, whom she wept with a sisterly affection which forgot the wrongs which he had done her. At these times she is said to have inhabited this palace. The memory of that radiant presence seems to mock its present desolation and give an added melancholy to the crumbling walls and mouldering courts which have so long survived the beings whom they were built to enshrine.

The convent itself is entered from the Via Pergolato. It is, however, defended by a very strict "clausura," which can only be broken with the special permission of the Cardinal Archbishop. The tombs of the Estensi are in the choir, or nun's church, which is shut off from the other part of the church. It is a plain square little place without any artistic interest whatever. A strange obscure resting-place for once absolute princes, and nothing emphasises more sharply the complete end of the Dukes of Ferrara and the order of things which they represented than to have to seek for their graves here, or where green fields have utterly obliterated all mark of them. A slab lying before the high altar records the names of Lucrezia Borgia, of Alfonso I., and his mother, Eleanora of Aragon. On either side, beneath like stones, lie Ercole II. and the first wife of Alfonso II., Lucrezia de' Medici, and in a row below are two nuns of the ducal House, daughters respectively of Alfonso I. and

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Ercole II., and a lady of the Gonzaga family. The stones are not of the same period as the dead whose names they bear, and the chapel must have suffered many changes since the sixteenth century.

There is an exceedingly picturesque double-storied cloister attached to the convent, surrounding a large neglected grass-grown court.

The church of Corpus Domini faces on to the little Via Campo Franco and has a fifteenth-century façade decorated with terra-cotta mouldings. The interior has no interest. The old decaying palace at the corner once belonged to the Varani of Camerino. This little cross-street, with Via Pergolato and Via Praisolo, was once the "Campo Franco" or authorised place of duels, and being partly embowered in vines was the haunt of evil characters. It was likewise the scene of a curious annual custom, the Battagliuola, or Battle of Children, instituted early in the fourteenth century to celebrate the victory of the citizens over the papal garrison in 1317 and the return of the Estensi. The children fought in two parties, with fruits which they launched from slings, but the custom became abused by elder people joining in with sticks and stones and knives, and was abolished by Alfonso II.

Returning to Via Savonarola, you pass the Strozzi palace, now the Luogo Pio Esposti (the Foundling Hospital), where the maiden loved by the young Savonarola dwelt, and Casa Savonarola, a plain little house, much modernised, which seems undoubtedly to have been the home of the Paduan physician's family, who sold it in 1472 to their neighbours the Strozzi. The situation of the house to which they moved, and which Girolamo quitted on that fateful St. George's Day in 1475, is not known. Opposite is S. Girolamo (seventeenth century), the church of the Cappuccini, and beyond stands Palazzo Agnelli, with its heavy

rustic façade, decorated with Hebrew, Greek and Latin inscriptions. Further on, where the street becomes Via Cisterna del Follo, is the palace, with battlemented tower and fine arched entrance, built about 1469 by Diotsalvi Neroni, a prominent member of the party opposed to the Medici, and one of the many Florentine "fuorusciti" who settled in Ferrara. He afterwards fell into disgrace with the Duke, and his palace was confiscated and was inhabited later by some of the princes of Este. One of the rooms has a beautiful sixteenth century ceiling, with arabesques, amidst which is emblazoned the White Eagle of Este.

Sta. Maria in Vado.—This great church, which stands opposite Schifanoia, is second in consequence to the Cathedral only. From very early times a sanctuary stood in this spot, to serve the needs of the settlers on this side of the river, which then ran close by. "In Vado" means "by the ford." The present church was built from the designs of Ercole Grandi, who was an architect as well as painter, by Biagio Rossetti, and has the same simple and dignified proportions and unobtrusive "cotta" ornamentation as the other Ferrarese churches of the same period. The west door has been restored. The interior has a majestic spaciousness and the effect of light in it is very good, nor is it spoilt, as most of these churches are, by the side aisles being filled in with chapels. A miracle happened here in 1171, when a priest who doubted of the Eucharistic mystery beheld blood spring from the chalice in his hands and sprinkle the vault over the altar. The vault, removed from its original place, is now enshrined in a great tabernacle with Renaissance ornamentation, in the south transept. The pictures once in the church have been taken to the Pinacoteca, and replaced by copies. A very interesting early sixteenth-century fresco remains,

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however, in a vaulted recess in the sacristy, an Allegory of the Birth of the Church. The Virgin and Child are seen crossing the Nile in a ship steered by St. Peter, to whom the Child is giving the Keys. Angels trim the sails. The arrangement of this picture is singularly charming, the colour warm and harmonious, the form and face of the Madonna very suave and gracious. The somewhat clumsy figures are characteristically Ferrarese, and it is usually attributed to Panetti, but I think very inappropriately.

Beyond Schifanoia is the convent of S. Vito, where the music of the nuns in the sixteenth century was so beautiful that Popes and princes wept when they heard it. Turning to the right past the prettily decorated exterior of the little disused church of Sta. Liberata, you come to St. Andrea, with its fine Gothic doorway, once a great rich sanctuary patronised by princes and nobles and filled with splendid pictures, and now dismantled and turned into a stable for passing detachments of cavalry. In a chapel on the south of the choir are some almost ruined Giottesque frescoes, popularly ascribed to the great master himself. A part of the west wall of the church is covered with an allegorical painting of the fourteenth century, in better preservation, but the significance of which is obscure. It apparently represents the Triumph of the True Doctrine. The colour is very decorative and shows a Giottesque influence, but the figures have the grace and prettiness of a different artistic temperament. A St. Christopher and St. Sebastian in the middle of the same wall are by a Ferrarese of the early sixteenth century, probably Panetti. The keys of the church are kept by the Head of the Police in Piazza Municipale; there is a separate key for the Giotto chapel.

In Via Borgo di Sotto, where some charming



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terra-cotta door-heads are to be seen, stands St. Appolinare, once the church of the Confraternity of Death, which performed the same pious offices as the Misericordia of Florence. There is an early fifteenth-century fresco of the Resurrection in the choir, an impressive composition, of which the artist is unknown. It was painted for the Confraternity, and a group of the black-hooded brethren may be seen in it.

The part of the city that we are now in is the old Ghibelline quarter. Via Salinguerra recalls the chief



TERRA-COTTA MOULDING OVER DOOR

who held the city for so long against the Estensi and their supporters. Here rose his palace, and here must have lain, if they existed anywhere out of "Sordello," those Sicilian gardens which he is described by the poet as having made for his bride Retrude. Near where the suppressed church of S. Pietro with its old brick façade stands, in the street of the same name, there had long existed a castle which was the stronghold of the party in the city identified later with the Ghibellines, and from which they defied the Guelf Castel Tedaldo. Salinguerra fortified all this part with towers and walls. These have now vanished, but the winding thoroughfares which find their way to the market-place and the maze of narrow streets and alleys which they thread keep a most picturesque aspect of

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antiquity. They are a delightful huddle of irregular roofs, quaint chimney-stacks and crumbling old brick walls patched with stucco, with fragments of rich "cotta" mouldings, and here and there a Gothic window, and bursts of vivid green above the walls of hidden gardens. Over all plays the strong sunshine patterned with shadows and reflecting itself in a golden glow in deep places withdrawn beneath arch or portico.

St. Antonio Vecchio, in Via Saraceno, has an elaborately decorated brick façade, but the terra-cotta work has been lately renewed, in a restoration of both exterior and interior.

At the end of the picturesque little Via Carmellino rises the beautiful Gothic tower of S. Gregorio, built in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and rebuilt in the fifteenth. It is a brick church, and both tower and façade are decorated with terra-cotta mouldings. The interior has been restored in the barocco style. An old building, with fifteenth-century façade and Gothic doorway in the same street as the church, is said to have been the home of Stella dall'Assassino, mother of Ugo, Leonello and Borso d'Este. Close by, in Via Giuoco di Pallone, stands the paternal home of Lodovico Ariosto, the scene of his heavy domestic cares after his father's death, and where the greater part of his poems were written.

You now emerge in Via delle Scienze, beside the famous Palazzo del Paradiso, built in 1391 by the Marquis Alberto. Here was lodged John Paleologus, Emperor of Constantinople, during the Council of the Churches in 1438. The façade was rebuilt in 1586-1610. With its low tower and "rustic" portico, it still has an imposing appearance. The large cortile contains a collection of sculptures, many of the Roman period, dug up in the Ferrarese province, or relics of old collections. One or two bear the inscription:

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“Questa preda e del Ducha di Ferrara.” Others are medieval, and among these there are some sarcophagi,



CAMPANILE OF SAN GREGORIO.

some pieces of the old pulpit of the Duomo, carved with Byzantine reliefs, and a very interesting little equestrian statue of the twelfth century, once upon the exterior of

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the Cathedral. It stands upon a capital sculptured with archaic Romanesque reliefs, showing figures and a curious representation of the church itself. Other fragments from the same building are in the passage leading through to the Botanical Gardens, some of rude twelfth-century workmanship and of symbolic import, others of a later and more accomplished period. The sixteenth-century bust of a lady on the east side of the court is Beatrice, daughter of Pellegrino Prisciano, the librarian and minister of Ercole I.

The only frescoes now left in the palace, where Antonio Alberti is said to have painted, besides the scene of the Great Council in 1438, a large fresco of Paradise, whence the name, "*del Paradiso*," is thought to have arisen, are some half-obliterated fifteenth-century wall paintings, not very good for their period, in the porter's room on the ground floor.

The famous University of Ferrara, founded in 1391, restored by Leonello and brought to its full glory under Borso and Ercole I., has been housed since 1581 in this palace, which Luigi d'Este, to whom it then belonged, sold to the Commune for the purpose. Before that the University had no fixed place, and the schools were held in various places—in the convents of S. Domenico and S. Francesco and elsewhere.

The Library, which occupies the stately rooms above, is not very old. The famous library of the Estensi, with all their other collections, was transferred to Modena, and this one did not come into existence till 1743. Now, thanks to the care of its librarians and to some splendid gifts, it has become a very fine collection, numbering a large quantity of manuscripts, and a number of early printed books, as well as autograph relics of Ariosto and Tasso. Among the books exhibited is the *Libro dei Gustiziati*, a register kept by the Confraternity of Death of executions



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between 1441 and 1557. It has a miniatures page showing the beheading of the gentlemen concerned in Ferrante and Giulio d'Este's plot in 1506. In the background appears the old Palazzo della Ragione, and the ducal palace with its loggias, a side view of another very interesting book is the *Tavole Astronomiche of Bianchini*, with a quaint miniature depicting the author, a minister of Borso's, and an amateur astronomer, presenting his book to Frederick III. during the Imperial visit in 1452. Borso stands beside him, wearing his newly-acquired ducal beretta. The miniature betrays a Ferrarese hand, not, however, so skilled a one as Cosimo Tura's, as was once erroneously supposed. Among the other illuminated books of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is Guarino da Verona's translation of Strabo's Geography, a very fair folio. A number of interesting autographs and documents occupy another case, among them an order from Parisina to her husband's treasurers, the signatures of Leonello, Ercole I., Lucrezia Borgia, Tasso's Leonora, and of many others of the Ducal House. In the adjoining room are some famous fragments of the *Orlando Furioso*, written in a free flowing hand by Ariosto himself. The countless erasures, rescriptions and alterations witness to the infinite pains with which he produced the clear, limpid and seemingly spontaneous flow of his "ottave." A facsimile reproduction of this manuscript has been lately published by the librarian, Professor Agnelli. The manuscript of the *Satires*, also exhibited here, is written by an amanuensis, but the corrections are in Ariosto's own hand. The Library possesses fifty-two old editions of Ariosto, the earliest and most interesting of which are shown in the cases. Some have the well-known woodcut, taken from a portrait of the poet attributed to Titian. Here are

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also fragments of the *Gerusalemme*, in T'asso's own hand, an autograph manuscript of verses addressed by the same poet to Lucrezia and Leonora d'Este, a will made by him in 1570 before starting on a journey to France, and many of the pathetic letters- which he wrote when a prisoner in St. Anna to his friends, full of complaint and prayers for their intercession with the Duke for his release. Among these is the well-known letter in which he begs Luca Scalabrini to send him a supply of clean linen, and with a nice particularity reminds him in the postscript to have the cloth in which the shirts are to be wrapped washed. The original manuscript of Guarini's *Pastor Fido* is also in the Library. Editions of Ferrarese music of the sixteenth century, some beautiful illuminated books of the same period, and a collection of rare impressions of Savonarola's writings, with very interesting allegorical woodcuts, are shown in this room. Still more precious are some splendid Ferrarese "incunabula." The first printing press was set up in the city in 1471 by André Beaufort, a Frenchman, and the practice quickly flourished. Lorenzo Rossi da Valenza was printing here at the end of the century. The *De Claris Muliebris* of Fra Jacopo da Bergamo, printed by him in 1497, a very beautiful and extremely rare book, is among these. It is a marvellous farrango of famous ladies of all ages, mythical, biblical and historical, and has a beautiful woodcut showing the author presenting his book to Beatrice of Aragon, Queen of Hungary and sister of the Duchess of Ferrara. The graceful and fanciful ornamentation of the page is very Ferrarese in character, and is repeated in the title page of *The Epistles of St. Jerome*, another book from Rossi's press, from which also issued the *Legend of S. Maurelius* in 1489.

Another very interesting book here is the *Banchetti* of Cristoforo Messisburgo (1544). The author was

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steward to Alfonso I., Ercole II. and Cardinal Ippolito II., and a personage of high standing and great importance, not without learning and culture. His book is a description of the artistic feasts given by those princes and arranged by him; the sugar deities and virtues, designed by good artists, which adorned the tables; the rare viands collected at great cost from all parts of the world; the concerts of various instruments of music, and the buffooneries "*alla veneziana*" with which the guests were entertained; the comedies which followed the banquet. The book has a quaint woodcut of a kitchen, with the cooks at work.

The tomb of Ariosto, a monument erected in 1612, and removed hither in 1801 from S. Benedetto, is placed at the end of the large hall. The poet's chair, and the inkstand given him by Alfonso I., with various other relics, are in the same room.

There are some very picturesque old brick houses in Via Mazzini and Via Vittoria. The former street used to be the Ghetto. Palazzo Contrari, at the head of the street of the same name, was once the home of the great House whose fortunes were made by the celebrated Uguccone under Niccolò III. and extinguished by the love of the last heir for a princess of Este. Uguccone was the first of the family to inhabit the palace, and Ercole, whose murdered body was carried back there after his fatal visit to Duke Alfonso II., the last. It has a fine cortile, with a double-storied portico of noble proportions on the entrance side. Some of the great rooms were once decorated with beautiful arabesques. They are now used as storehouses, or as tenements for poor families. A little further on is the Montecatini palace with a very beautiful cortile, and in a still more melancholy state of decay and squalor. To this sad end are come the stately homes of the luxurious Ferrarese nobles.

## CHAPTER XV

### *More Palaces, Churches and Streets*

Palazzo Crispi—Sta. Maria della Rosa—San Giuliano—San Domenico—Via Grande—Palazzo Lodovico il Moro—St. Antonio in Polesine—San Giorgio—San Bertolo—Belriguardo—City Walls.

IN Via Borgo Leone stands the sixteenth-century Palazzo Crispi, of severe classic style and somewhat heavy effect. The church of the Gesù beyond contains the grandiose tomb of Barbara of Austria. Crossing into Via Alberto Lollio, where at the end of the street on the left is the old palace built by Alfonso I. for Laura Dianti, you reach Via Armari. Sta. Maria della Rosa, which stands at the corner by the Viale, contains a Mortorio of 1485 by Guido Mazzoni, a Bolognese. This group of life-sized terra-cotta figures, coloured, offend by their rude naturalism and exaggerated expression, but show vigour and ability. The inartistic illusion of reality must, however, make such work always unbeautiful.

In the Piazza on the west of the Castle stands the little Gothic church of San Giuliano, particularly interesting for its terra-cotta decoration. It was built in 1405, and has been well restored quite recently. Upon the pinnacles of the richly-ornamented door are small sculptured figures, Christ in the midst, and on either side the Virgin and the Angel of the Annunciation. A quaint bas-relief above, evidently of earlier



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date than the church, shows San Giuliano slaying his father and mother in bed, having mistaken them for his wife and a stranger, as the legend tells. The Ferrarese interpret the scene symbolically, as Adam and Eve being turned out of Paradise, which is represented by the bed.

Via San Stefano, with its old brick houses and wide shadowy porticoes, is one of the most picturesque streets in the city. The church has a beautiful Gothic tower, with delicate "cotta" mouldings, and the façade is ornamented with the same work, a variation of the usual devices being the three large "tondi," the middle one enclosing the Sacred Monogram surrounded by the twelve Apostles, and the others rather coarsely moulded half-length figures of saints. The interior has been modernised.

San Domenico, one of the largest churches in Ferrara, was founded in the thirteenth century. A legend tells how St. Dominic, passing through the city, was received and entertained in the palace of a noble. But when night came he stole forth from his luxurious lodging and went and laid himself down in a humble gardener's cot, where from that time forth miracles took place. On the site of this cottage rose the church. Unfortunately it was rebuilt in the eighteenth century and the fine old Gothic interior entirely destroyed. It contains in a chapel on the south side "one of the most beautiful Madonnas of the fourteenth century," to quote M. Burckhardt. The painter of this fresco is not known, but its grace and wistful devotional calm and fresh clear colour suggest the Siennese school. The Virgin is of an exquisite loveliness. The picture, which is kept veiled, should on no account be missed by visitors. There are also very fine choir stalls. The upper row, of Gothic form, belong to the fourteenth century. Maestro

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Giovanni da Modena, who carved them, has inscribed his name on the south side, and the donor, Madonna Tomasina Gruamonte, is commemorated in some



CHURCH OF SAN STEFANO.

quaint lines upon the last stall on the same side. The lower row are Cinquecento. Portions of early fifteenth-century frescoes, extremely interesting to the student of art, have been discovered upon a wall belonging to the old church by the industry and enthusiasm of the sacristan, who spent

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long hours on bitter winter evenings patiently scraping the whitewash away with a penknife, by the light of one candle, and defended, as he will tell you, from the unknown terrors of that dark place, by the special protection of the Virgin.

The palace facing into the Piazza San Domenico is the Palazzo Strozzi. It is much modernised but has a fine door. The great Bentivoglio palace, close by, in the old Via della Rotta (Via Garibaldi), was built by Borso d'Este in 1449, and embellished in its present ornate style in 1585 by Cornelius Bentivoglio, the great captain and minister of Alfonso II., and the most powerful personage at Court, secretly feared even by the Duke himself.

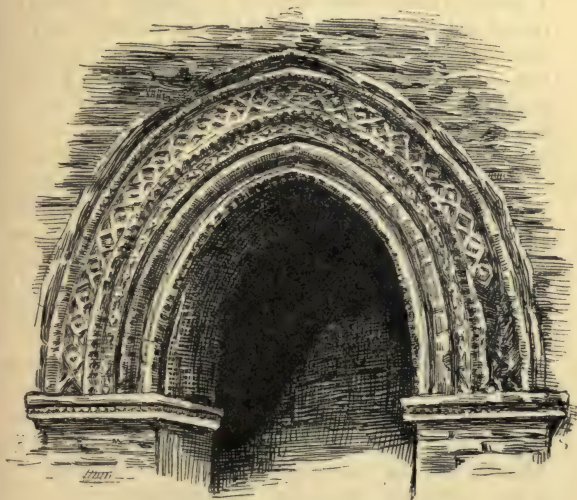
The picturesque little Sta. Maria Nuova, in its quiet piazzetta, contains an early Ferrarese Madonna and Child.

We are now near the outskirts of the city, which abuts close by in an aimless and mutilated fashion upon the wide Piazza d'Armi. This space was once partly occupied by the river, beside which, enclosed within walls, lay once one of the busiest and most populous quarters of the city, with several large churches and numerous palaces in it. At the south-west angle of the walls, upon the river, stood the old Castel Tedaldo, built in the tenth century, and near by were some of the most frequented of the city gates. Most of the river traffic disembarked here and flowed up the Via della Rotta to the market-place. The Castle, with all the crowded buildings around it, as well as the palace of Belvedere outside, was ruthlessly destroyed by Clement VIII. in 1599 to make room for his great Fortezza. This was demolished in its turn in 1859, when the Austrian garrison abandoned it.

Via Grande or Ripa Grande runs all along the south side of the city, beside the old course of the river, as

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“ripa” (bank) indicates. It was the first street built on this side of the river, and was the scene in medieval times of the public races on St George’s Days and a thousand popular festivals. Lucrezia Borgia passed along here on her nuptial journey. It has now quite lost its old busy importance as well as



DOORWAY IN VIA RIPA GRANDE.

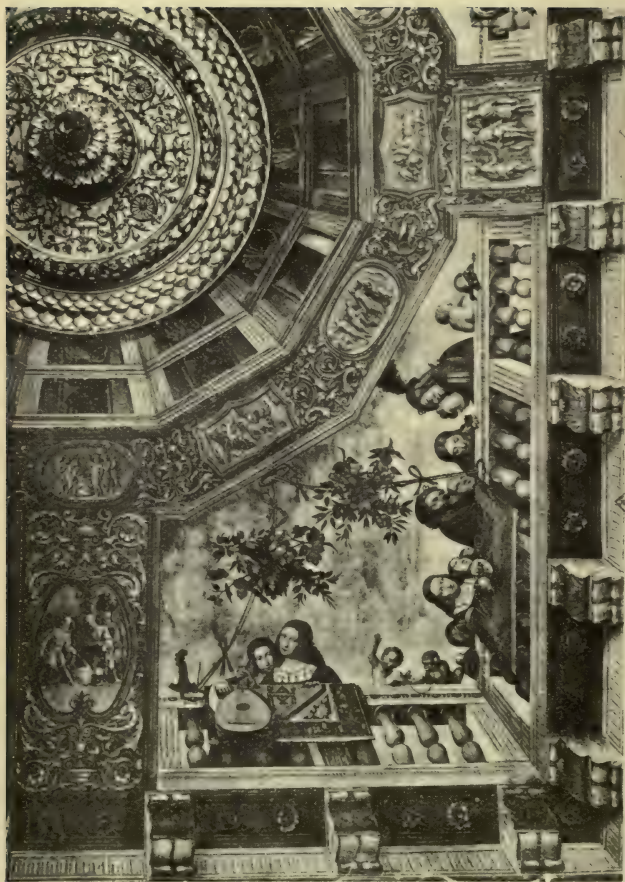
much of its medieval aspect. But there are some picturesque houses in it. No. 10 is a very perfect example of a brick house of the early Renaissance; windows and painted doorways are decorated with delicate “cotta” mouldings. In the little Via Carri, behind the church of San Giuseppe, may be found some beautiful door-heads which have not suffered restoration.



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Via della Ghiaia (or Venti Settembre) occupies a part of the old river-bed reclaimed by Niccolò III. and his sons. Here stands the Palazzone, or Palazzo Lodovico il Moro. This palace was built by the Ferrarese ambassador at Milan, Antonio Costabili. According to tradition, he was charged to do so by Lodovico Sforza who desired to prepare a place of refuge and repose for himself in this peaceful city, in case misfortune befell him. No documentary proof of this story has been found, and the palace, which belongs to the early years of the sixteenth century, was hardly begun before the prison doors of Loches had closed for ever upon the Sforza and all his plans. But there is a fitness in the association of this prince of the great unfulfilled schemes and swift tragic career with the beautiful unfinished building, come now to such unworthy use. Its great size, "enough for ten palaces," the noble proportions of the arcades, to which the combination of brick and marble gives an impression of mingled stateliness and lightness, the rich terra-cotta mouldings and sculptured capitals and pilasters make it the most splendid and typical example of Ferrarese palace architecture of the Renaissance period. The builder was Biagio Rossetti, and Gabriele Frisoni of Mantua did the decoration. Only two sides of the great cortile are built, and a wing facing upon Via Buon A more. Squalor and poverty now occupy this habitation of princes and nobles and Cinquecento luxury. The beautiful upper loggias have been bricked or boarded up. In the cornice the swallows have set their nests, each little mud dwelling fixed curiously between two cherubs, and below the "popolino," not half so neatly, have filled up the great chambers with their hovels. The grass springs thick between the cobblestones of the cortile, where slatternly women wash their rags and slap them against wooden boards





PART OF CEILING FRESCO ATTRIBUTED TO ERCOLE GRANDI

[Anderson, Rome.]

(MAY 1890, BY MODO)

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leant up against the stately columns, and scores of children, with angel faces dimmed by dirt, tumble and play. Two lofty rooms on the east side have ceilings elaborately frescoed, by scholars of Garofalo, with biblical and classical subjects, interspersed with arabesques in the usual style of this decoration. The figures are coarsely drawn, the colour heavy and opaque, the whole work conventional and uninspired, but sumptuous in effect.

In the southern wing, however, there is a frescoed ceiling of very rare beauty. Unfortunately it is extremely difficult to gain admittance to the chamber, as the owner, Marchese Calcagnini, will not permit it to be visited. Those who succeed in penetrating are greeted by an enchanting spectacle. Down into the empty chamber gaze groups of personages who lean over a balustrade of graceful Renaissance form—fair women, with hair flowing in rich waves from the close nets which bind their brows, gay cavaliers and pages in feathered caps—while upon the balustrade “putti” frolic with monkeys. Festoons of fruit and leaves are suspended over their heads, and behind them opens the blue sky, suffused with light and air and carrying the eye up into space. This delightful illusion seems to introduce us to some ideal Renaissance Court where life moves to the sound of dreamy melodies in an atmosphere of perfect joy and calm. The painting is in excellent preservation, except that in one part the ceiling has been broken by the weight of sacks stored overhead, and has been shored up with wooden supports and the cracks repaired with a liberal plaster of whitewash.

The name of the painter of this fresco is not recorded. The monochrome arabesques and the lunettes in the spandrels, which complete the decoration, are doubtless by workmen of the Garofalo school, and the central



painting used always to be attributed to that artist till Morelli pronounced it to be by Ercole Grandi, an opinion which is now generally followed. But the claim of Garofalo has been reasserted lately by Professor Agnelli in his "Note" on the palace, with arguments based on the resemblance of the idea in this and the Seminario ceiling. But the idea is not peculiar to these two paintings, and the refined and masterly drawing here is very different to the heavy and uninspired handling of Garofalo; nor do the distinction and almost Raphaelesque suavity of the heads, and the fresh luminous colour, seem like Ercole Grandi. Perhaps the true author has yet to be found.

The house which Biagio Rossetti, the architect to whom most of the beautiful Renaissance buildings in Ferrara are due, built for himself, is a few steps further on in Via Ghiaia. It is a dignified little building, decorated with mouldings in higher relief than usual. Close by, at the end of Via Grande, is the sixteenth-century church of the Madonnina, which has behind the high altar an ancient fresco of the Madonna once upon an old gate of the city, and repainted when transferred to the church.

A little to the south, and quite on the edge of the city, lies the church and Benedictine convent of St. Antonio in Polesine, founded in the thirteenth century by the Beata Beatrice d'Este. The story goes that this lady, daughter of Azzo Novello, while she was on a journey to join her bridegroom, Gallasso Manfredi, heard the news of his sudden death. "Whereupon she returned immediately towards Ferrara, where, being arrived, and having dismissed all the knights who attended her, she said to the women who remained with her that she did not wish to enter any more into the city, but that she was minded to betake herself elsewhere, where, far from the cares of the world, she

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might serve the Divine Majesty cloistered for the rest of her life, and she gave all the choice of staying behind or following her. But those most loved by her elected to live or to die under her command. These were the noble ladies Greca, India, Palma, Gualdrada, Brigida, Melenda and Costanza, and four damsels. With them she went to a little church in the suburbs, and putting away every vain ornament, they all robed themselves in coarse grey garments, after the fashion of nuns, and lived there in great sanctity." After a little time her father built this convent for her upon an island or "polesine" in the midst of the river, and there she lived and ruled as Abbess till her death. She was afterwards beatified by the Pope on account of her holy life.

The church, with its graceful brick portico, stands in a wide grass-grown court. Except for late arabesques the interior has no artistic interest. But the nuns' choir and the convent, from both of which you are shut out by a strict "clausura," unless armed with a permission from the Archbishop, contain paintings of very great interest. Those privileged to enter are first led into the chapel of the Beata Beatrice, whose bones used to warn her House of approaching misfortune by giving forth groans. Since the Estensi quitted the city she appears to have lain quiet, but her tomb still distils water with miraculous healing powers during the winter months. Upon the altar the skull of this princess, at whose feet troubadours knelt and sang, grins within a glass casket from beneath a wreath of roses.

The body of the nuns' church, which you next visit, has little interest, but there are two chapels of Pointed style at the east end, covered all over with half-ruined frescoes of the Gospel story, by a fourteenth or early fifteenth-century painter belonging

to the early school of painting of this part of Italy and showing a good deal of the special Ferrarese character developed later by Galasso and Tura. Those in the right-hand chapel, which are the best preserved, have been partly destroyed to make a staircase into the convent. The middle chapel, divided from the others by pilasters whereon are figures of S. Benedetto and S. Placido, has a ceiling decorated with arabesques, and upon the left-hand wall a row of saints with the Madonna and Child, showing in the softness of the contours and the suavity of expression affinity with the Umbrian painters. It is generally assigned to Antonio Alberti, but M. Brach disputes this attribution. There is also a fresco of the Scourging, a poor but not unpleasing work of 1519.

In the convent itself, in a magnificent gallery off which open the cells of the nuns, there are three extremely interesting paintings of the fifteenth century, disposed down the middle of the ceiling. These are attributed to the unknown artist of the June and July frescoes in Schifanoia. The first, Sta. Scholastica, a very dignified figure, sheltering within the outspread folds of her cloak a bevy of nuns of her order, and the second, God the Father, in which the painter's conception is hardly equal to the subject, both show the characteristics of the Schifanoia artist—the wide staring eyes, the dark red-brown flesh tints, though they are much finer than his work in the palace. But the third picture, a Madonna and Child, must have come from a more masterly hand. The Virgin sits upon a stone seat with a high back. Behind her is a low wall, with vases filled with fruits upon it, seen against a dark sky whereon float wavelets of white cloud; on her either side stands a pink flowered hollyhock growing in a pot. Her mantle, of a terracotta red, opens over a deep blue robe. The beauty

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of her fair pensive face, which recalls some of the most attractive heads in Cossa's part of the Schifanoia frescoes, the grace and simplicity of the whole composition and the rich and original colouring, make this one of the most remarkable of Ferrarese paintings.

In a room below, where the nuns keep a store of preserved eggs against their winter needs, there is another fresco of God the Father, a weak replica of that in the gallery. Other of the household places also are frescoed. The convent must once have been entirely clothed with paintings; through the whitewash on the long corridor walls appears everywhere some half vanished figure, some haloed head of saint or angel. Complete oblivion and isolation from the world has fallen on this splendid home of the religious, honoured by sovereigns, visited by more than one Pope, the chosen retreat of the daughters of Este. It has been stripped of all its wealth and only a few gentle tenants with pale faces that never see the sun are left to wander in its vast decaying chambers and precincts. There is a cortile where they take their walks in an alley of fruit trees overgrown with roses and repose on stone benches when weary. Carefully tended little plots are disposed in geometrical arrangement within it, full of sweet-smelling flowers, and there is a deep well clothed thickly inside with trailing weeds and delicate ferns. The cloister on one side has a gallery over it supported on slender wooden pillars, twisted and fluted in exquisite taste. An atmosphere of innocence and peace pervades this place. The centuries pass by it unnoticed, and the old medieval faith reigns undisturbed within the enchanted circle of the papal "clausura." The nuns, for whom the world does not exist, show no fear of the rare stranger, but a perfect simplicity and ease, and a pretty curiosity, like the dwellers in an Arcadia. When you take your leave



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and are put out through a door in a high wall into the city street again, the real life of the twentieth century smites unkindly upon your senses.

A short walk now leads by a bridge over the canal which has taken the place of the old Po di Ferrara, to the suburb of San Giorgio on the other side, the site of the first city of Ferrara. It has little of interest, except the church, which represents the original Cathedral, and which, after many rebuildings, was finally restored in debased style in the eighteenth century. It contains the beautiful marble tomb of Bishop Roverella, sculptured by Ambrogio da Milano in the latter part of the fifteenth century—the only monument of the kind to be seen in Ferrara. There is a very picturesque old cloister beside the church. The monks, Monte Olivetani, have been long driven out. The tall brick tower, with its characteristic ornamentation, was built by Biagio Rossetti in 1485.

A pleasant walk between fields brings you in about twenty minutes to the old disused church and convent of San Bertolo (Bartholomew), a mass of picturesque brick buildings, crowned with a wide steepled tower, singularly graceful. The façade, with its lofty and slender portal, is decorated with terra-cotta mouldings and enamelled pottery.

By San Giorgio also lies the way to the famous palace of Belriguardo, one of the few ducal villas of which any trace is left. It lies about eight miles from Ferrara, close to Voghenza, once a Roman city. Through an imposing arched entrance you pass into a vast court, which admits again into a second as large. The surrounding buildings are used as barns and storehouses and dwellings for peasants, and nothing of their former splendour is left except some Gothic windows with very beautiful tracery, belonging to the earliest period

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of the palace, the first half of the fifteenth century, and a great hall with half-vanished Dossesque frescoes.

Ferrara is still surrounded by her once famous, now decaying walls, which were so strongly and cunningly constructed by the military ingenuity of the Dukes and their engineers that the report of them gave pause even to the fury of Julius II. They were a model for all Europe. One may picture Duke Alfonso riding round them and explaining their construction to a visitor, a Florentine engineer named Michael Angelo, commissioned to fortify his native city. Such a girdle was necessary for the fair luxurious city in the midst of her defenceless plain. A drive along the Strada di Circonvallazione from San Giorgio, past the Porta Mare to the Porta Po on the west side, gives a good view of them. The long stretch facing north, with the solitary Porta degli Angeli in its midst, keeps its old form and presents a long vista of crumbling brick bastions, overgrown with tangled thickets of grass and brushwood. You seem to be looking at some solitary seashore set with low headlands. The moat which once lay beneath is now a wide border of swampy grass, where sheep pasture, and is edged by a narrow canal, which makes a long silver streak in this strange landscape of converging lines of road and fields and poplars. There is no sign of habitation to be seen above the walls; the shrunken city is far withdrawn within and hardly a church tower can be spied. Here, outside, where the great teams of oxen, six yoke to a plough, slowly furrow the deep soil, and rich crops of wheat and hemp spring in their track, the ducal "Barco" once spread for miles, full of wild game and defended from intruders by cruel penalties. About a mile to the north lies the ancient village of Lagoscuero, upon the Po. It has become of late years a huddle of factory chimneys. A picturesque bridge

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of boats spans the wide river, which flows, languidly enough at most times, between low banks. But here are great defences raised to protect the country from flood. For the terror of the King of Rivers is by no means past. Its bed rises, rises without cease, and "Po in piena" is a thing for which watchers must be ever ready.

A delightful walk extends all the way along the top of the city walls, between a double rank of chestnut trees, above where the Viale connecting the ducal gardens once ran. These have quite vanished. But the Montagnone, close to San Giorgio, a large artificial hill made with the earth cast up from the great fosse dug by Alfonso I., in preparation for Pope Julius's attack, is still there to recall the famous "delizia" which surrounded it. It is now a public garden. Further on, at the north-east corner of the walls, you come upon a melancholy little hillock of the same nature, once the Montagnola. This, with its subterranean gardens, was a favourite summer resort of the Dukes, and is memorable for a tragedy that happened there and with which our tale of Ferrara must end.

On the night of the 25th May 1579, a great spectacular tournament was arranged to take place beneath the Montagnola in honour of the Archduke Charles of Austria. It was called the Isola Beata. A wooden castle had been erected in the middle of the moat and was supposed to be defended by monsters and magicians, with the aid of flames and incantations. A company of cavaliers was to attack and destroy it. The Duke and his guest, with all the nobility, were ranged upon seats in the gardens above, while the common people were crowded upon the walls. A thousand torches lighted the scene, and the fires from the castle reflected themselves in the moat. All was ready to begin, when a party of

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the assailants, cavaliers of the noblest Houses in Ferrara, descending too hastily from the walls into a boat close to the Porta degli Angeli, were upset into the moat. Four of them, embarrassed by the weight of their armour, were drowned. The Duke, when informed of the accident, insisted nevertheless, in spite of the entreaties of the Archduke and the horror of all present, that the tournament should proceed. Disordered and disarranged, the principal actors gone, the leader, Cornelius Bentivoglio, father and brother of two of the drowned men, unable to appear, the ghastly performance was hurried through to the end beneath the eyes of the inflexible Duke.

The horror of that intrusion of Death into the festival, three centuries ago, still hangs about this place. Upon it has fallen the curse which attended on "the antique brood of Este" in those last days of their overblown sovereignty, and it is now utterly deserted and forlorn. On a May evening, when the honeysuckle which clothes the wall from top to base breathes forth its heavy scent and low clouds cover the sky, you shudder as you pass, for surely ghosts walk here.



TERRA-COTTA MOULDING OVER DOORWAY.



## CHAPTER XVI

### *The Abbey of Pomposa*

“IF loosening from the shore of Ferrara thou sailest for twenty-five miles towards the east, thou shalt find a village which is called Caput Gauri” (Capo di Goro, Codigoro), “situated in a corner of the island of Pomposa, where the Goro issues from Po, flowing towards the north. . . . This island is encircled on the west and on the north by the river Goro, on the south by the old Po . . . and on the east is bounded by the Adriatic Sea. If leaving Codigoro by the old Po thou impellest thy bark for about eight miles through the mouth of the Volano thou shalt beat the Adriatic Ocean with thine oars.”

The words of the trecento chronicler give a good idea of the strange Eridanian world of which Ferrara was once queen, and out of which have risen the great green levels that now stretch between the city and the sea. Pomposa is no longer an island, and he who would journey thither to-day—the expedition may be accomplished between sunrise and sunset in spring—will have no use for a bark, but must instead take the steam tram from the railway station. This will carry him slowly between rich fields of wheat and hemp hedged round by vine-wreathed trees. If it be May the many stoppages will be solaced by the nightingale’s song flowing from every bush. Birds love this warm wet soil, spread through long ages by the Po and its followers.

At Codigoro, beside the Po di Volano, the tram-



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way ends near a row of ugly works, one of which is a huge establishment for draining the land. Here is seen the modern aspect of the great battle with the waters which has been going on ever since man first began to make a foothold in the estuary of the Po. It is not very long since the country all round Codigoro was covered with shallow lagoons and bred nothing but fish, wild duck, leeches, mosquitoes and malaria. The people tell a legend of four-and-twenty Englishmen who appeared some twenty-five years ago with their "macchine," and stayed three years, during which time they performed the miracle of transforming the watery waste into the fertile pastures and fields which we see now. Had those Englishmen come a few centuries earlier their leader must have been canonised and a church raised in his honour. For San Guido of Pomposa himself, with his famous talent for converting wine into water, was hardly such a benefactor as the converter of water into dry land. The work of draining has been going on ever since, but is now done by Germans.

A simple little inn, the Leon d'Oro, offers the traveller a very friendly hospitality, and there one of those remarkable little vehicles, only found in the remoter parts of Italy, and which would inevitably fall to pieces except in a land of miracles, is forthcoming to carry one across the three miles to the church of Pomposa.

As you proceed along the bare road you soon become aware of a stately presence between the few poplars that straggle on the horizon; a stem slender and soaring as theirs, and only a thought more solid, the Campanile. With the church, the vestiges of the monastery and a dwelling or two close by, it stands alone, on the edge of the redeemed land. Just beyond it the country returns to its primeval state and is a



waste of lagoons, out of which emerge strips and patches of dark scrub and reedy herbage. The tower seems still to stand as the advance guard of civilisation, as in ages past when it was the standard of the great Benedictine conflict with savage Nature. It rears its great height before us, springing as it were from the very rim of the earth, nothing behind it from base to far-off cross save the vast concave of air. It might be a lighthouse for travellers in space. A pharos it was indeed once, throwing the beams of Pomposa's Star far over the salt waters that beat inwards from the Adriatic into the many yawning mouths of the river, and guiding the mortal mariner to his haven as well as the immortal soul to its salvation. At the foot of the Campanile stands the small church, its low stately vestibule pierced by a dark triple archway. An unbroken sunshine seems to bathe these solitary buildings, the wind blows free round their forgotten walls, and they dream in an endless afternoon of repose after the far-off eventful morning of their historic past. They are "Pomposa" still, even in the extremity of desolation; though the great ones of the earth no longer pass by, the proud abbots are lost in the common dust, and the last of the many hundreds of monks that once paced the precincts and laboured in the fields long ago turned his back and fled from the unconcluded struggle with Nature.

There was probably a hermitage and chapel on this spot from the remotest days of Christianity, but when the Benedictines first settled here is not known. Their patient hands had been long at work embanking the streams and building up tracts of rich soil when in 874 the community is heard of for the first time, as the subject of a contention between the Pope and the Archbishop of Ravenna, each of whom claimed jurisdiction over it. This shows that it was already of some consequence.

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The Volano was at that time the main stream of the Po, and the port at its mouth was crowded by ships of commerce which sailed up and down between the coast cities and the great inland towns of the Po valley, Ferrara and her sisters of the Emilia and Lombardy. The country round Pomposa was the scene of a human industry and movement difficult to conceive now. The community was daily increased by those who sought a refuge from the devastations of the barbarians in a place where, protected by the Church, civilisation still survived. More and more territory was reclaimed by the monks, and the monastery was enriched by princes and nobles with lands and fiefs.

In the year 1000 it was released from the authority of the Archbishop of Ravenna and declared free and independent by Otho III. In this century the monastery reached its highest prosperity under the great Abbot, Guido da Ravenna, who held jurisdiction over territories stretching as far as the Adige. The monopoly of the fishing around was his and doubtless yielded much revenue; great wealth besides was drawn from agriculture. Guido rebuilt the convent on a scale of great magnificence, and united together all the scattered members of the community who had hitherto dwelt solitary in hermitages amid the woods. There was no other monastery in Italy so rich or so famous for virtue and scholarship except Monte Cassino. The Benedictines were in a two-fold sense cultivators; husbandmen of mental as well as of material fields, redeeming letters from the floods of barbarism, as they had won their harvests from the wastes of Po. The library of Pomposa was of wide celebrity and contained many treasures of ancient literature, and so famous was the monastery as a school that the noblest youth of Italy were sent there to be educated.

Abbot Guido was renowned for the holiness of his

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life, and he ordained the strictest rules for the community. Fish was to be their daily food all the year round, and bread and vegetables might be indulged in only three times a week. The youth under his care were brought up with severe discipline and the utmost virtue and obedience instilled into them. A pretty legend illustrates the success of his teaching. The great Marquis of Tuscany, Bonifazio, on one of his frequent visits to Pomposa, observed one day in the church a group of boys kneeling before the altar absorbed in contemplation and singing with the most admirable devoutness. Learning that this was their constant practice and wishing to try their sincerity he took means to have a handful of money scattered upon them one day from the roof. But not a single hand stirred to take up the coins, not a single eyelid was so much as uplifted to glance in their direction, so perfectly had these children learned to despise the things of the world in comparison with spiritual joys.

Nevertheless, in spite of such shining examples of piety, slanders began to be spread abroad concerning Pomposa by other communities jealous of its fame. It was said that intellectual pride had overcome the primitive piety and laborious industry of its earlier days, and that laxness of life and sinful luxury prevailed in the convent. But Guido by a signal miracle confuted his enemies. The Archbishop of Ravenna, Gebeardo, having been charged by Pope John XIX. to inquire into the truth of the reports, disguised himself as a simple traveller and went and asked for hospitality at the monastery. Sitting at meat with the Abbot he was astounded to observe that from the same vessel Guido filled the cups of his guests with wine, his own with water—a miracle which completely convinced him of the ascetic virtue and

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extreme holiness of the slandered saint. And thus Guido triumphantly proved to a narrow-minded generation that the love of ancient codices was not incompatible with piety.

Peter Damiani, the famous scholastic and saint, spent two years at the monastery, from 1040 to 1042, as he tells Dante in *Paradise*:<sup>1</sup>

“e Pietro peccator fui nella casa  
di Nostra Donna in sul lito Adriano.”

He attracted many scholars by his teaching. Another celebrated inmate was Guido Aretino, the reformer of the musical scale, who was born at Arezzo at the end of the tenth century and entered this convent early in life. His great gifts and the success of his vocal teaching is said to have roused the jealousy of his fellow monks, who poisoned the mind of the Abbot against him, so that after a time the great musician abandoned Pomposa and returned to his native city.

The way most frequented at that time between Venice and Ravenna passed close by Pomposa, and the monastery was continually visited by travellers from the one city to the other. The young Emperor Otho III. honoured the island with his presence in 1001. The Marquis Bonifazio retired there for penance and mortification when over-troubled by the burden of his sins, and is said to have submitted himself before the altar to the scourge of the stern Abbot Guido, who imposed this punishment upon him for certain trespasses upon ecclesiastical rights. Frederick Barbarossa sojourned at the monastery in 1177, if the chroniclers may be trusted. Thither too came the warriors of the Cross to kneel before the Abbot and receive his

<sup>1</sup> According to some commentators. See note to Canto XXI., 121-123, Wicksteed's translation.



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blessing ere taking ship for the Holy Land. In later days Dante probably visited the Abbey, when journeying to Venice as envoy from Ravenna.

There was continual communication between Pomposa and Ferrara. The Estensi were generous patrons of the convent, and Ugo d'Este, whom some chroniclers erroneously credit with having founded it in 950, and others of the House, bestowed lands and wealth upon the monks. In 1270 Abbot Ventura put the monastery under the protection of la Casa d'Este, and Pomposa lost its proud independence and was included thenceforth in the jurisdiction of the lords of Ferrara. Later on the revenues were enjoyed by Rinaldo Maria d'Este, a son of Niccolò III., and afterwards by the Cardinal Ippolito I., with the title of Abbate Commendatario. But long before this the glory of the great convent had departed. Its prosperity was built on an unstable foundation. The inconstant waters of the Po gradually deserted the channel of the Volano; the bed filled up, the stream dwindled to narrow runlets, and the big ships found their way up it no more. The sea retreated and the wholesome breezes died away; the air grew heavy, and pestilent insects infested it and fever afflicted the inhabitants. Visitors became few and the busy hum of industry was no longer heard. As early as the end of the twelfth century the changed conditions around had begun to make Pomposa an undesirable dwelling, and from that time many were the complaints of the monks. The monastery lost its importance and its numbers dwindled away, till in 1550 the monks entirely abandoned it and transferred themselves to the convent of San Benedetto in Ferrara.

The church, which, like the tower, is of brick, is a Romanesque structure, built in the eleventh century, according to an inscription on the pavement of the

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interior. But a slab on the façade bears a legend which claims the honour of building "this house to thee, oh Virgin," for one John of Vidore, Abbot, and one Peter, a priest, in the year 1150, during the reign of the Emperor Conrad III. and the papacy of Eugenius III., and calls on the people to pray to Christ that He would open wide the celestial doors of Olympus to the pious pair. The church was probably partly rebuilt or restored by them.

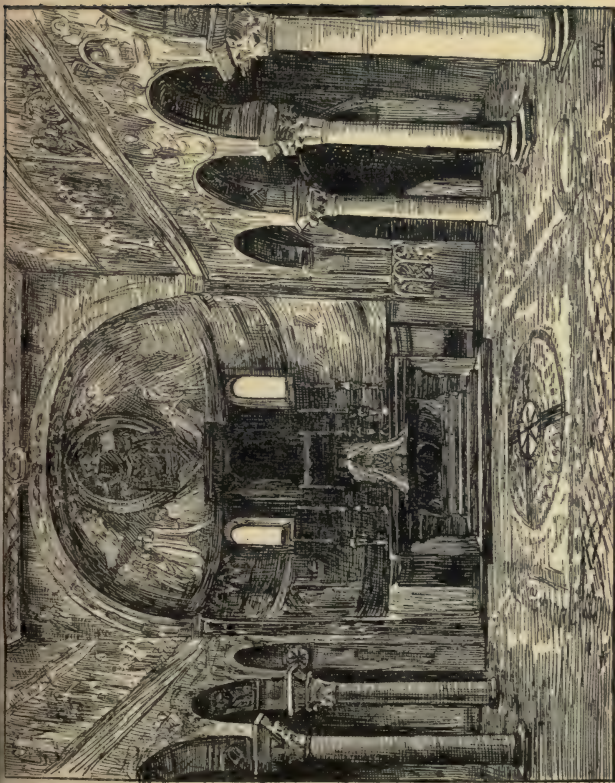
The façade of the long low vestibule is decorated with sculptured friezes of rich design, in which, alternating with large leaves or fruits, appear strange creatures pursuing each other, grotesque human figures, bears, horses, birds, dogs, a whale swallowing a man, all woven into the continuous curve of the pattern. The upper one is imperfect and made up in places of fragments of other designs, possibly from an older church on the same spot. Two crosses formed of the sculptured ornament descend from the upper frieze, one showing in the centre the Lamb, the other a Hand Blessing. A lion, an eagle and a peacock, sculptured upon slabs, are let into the wall on either side of the entrance, and in between each appears the Star, emblem of the Abbey, its rays formed by pale coloured bricks, the centre of brilliant enamelled pottery. The triple arches of the entrance are enriched with bands of sculptured decoration and with an outer band of pale bricks, as are also the round windows on either side. These last are filled in with a rich tracery of animals and vines.

We pass through the vestibule into the church beneath a faded fresco of the Madonna and Child. The interior is a simple basilica, with a long nave ending in an apse, and with side aisles that have been partitioned off from one another to make chapels. These divisions, so out of accord with the original plan of the church,

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which was intended to have but the one altar in the apse, injure the beautiful architectural effect of the interior. The arcade dividing the nave from the side aisles is supported on slender marble columns, with double capitals richly carved. The walls are covered with frescoes of the fourteenth century, much damaged by damp and decay. There are three series in the nave, one above the other. The highest gives on the south side the Old Testament story from the Creation to Joseph ; it is continued on the north, where, however, very few of the subjects are distinguishable. In the middle series the Gospel story is depicted, and below, fitted into the spaces between the arches, we see the strange visions of the Apocalypse, beginning on the south side with St. John's vision of Christ with the seven golden candlesticks, and continuing with Christ seated in the rainbow with the four-and-twenty elders ; the Lamb surrounded by the Evangelic Beasts ; the Riders of the white, red, black and pale horses ; the three terrible Horsemen, "whose power is in their mouths and tails, for their tails were like unto serpents," and St. John rushing forward to take "the little book which is open in the hand of the Angel."

Opposite we see the Woman clothed with the sun, and having the moon under her feet ; beside her the seven-headed Beast with its mouth shooting out flames. Michael and his Angels warring with the Dragon, the Beast "like unto a leopard, having seven heads," and that other Beast "which causeth the earth and them which dwell on the earth to worship the first Beast, and causeth all to receive a mark in their right hand or their forehead." The Son of Man sitting upon the cloud, and the Angels bidding him thrust in his sickle and reap. The Scarlet Woman seated upon the seven-headed Beast, the Golden Cup in her hand. Then Him "that sat upon the horse and was called



INTERIOR, BADIA OF POMPOSA.





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Faithful and True. . . . Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should rule the nations; the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, followed by the armies of Heaven." Next the Angel standing in the sun and calling all the fowls that fly in the midst of Heaven to gather themselves together unto the supper of the Great God. Lastly an Angel piercing the Dragon with a long spear. In the apse there is a great figure of Christ in glory, with a choir of saints and angels on either side. Below, on the left, the four Evangelists; on the right the four great Doctors of the Church, almost effaced. Underneath, scenes from the rarely painted legend of St. Eustace. This saint was a noble Roman warrior, who one day as he hunted beheld a stag with a cross between his horns, and being straightway converted to the Christian faith, was baptized with his wife and two children. Misfortune then befell him, his wife was carried off by pirates and his children by wild beasts. After fourteen years the family, having escaped from their various dangers, were reunited, but just as they were about to live happily together the Emperor commanded a great festival to the gods, and Eustace refused to sacrifice to them. He was condemned, with his wife and children, to be roasted in a brazen bull. This celebration of a huntsman saint is peculiarly appropriate in a church situated amidst the wild forests and morasses where the lords of Ferrara loved to follow the stag and the wild boar, and many a time perhaps entered here, hot from the chase, to kneel before the altar and listen to a Mass beneath these pictures of their prototype.

The frescoes of Pomposa have no extraordinary distinction in themselves. It is their position which gives them their beauty and value. The unknown artists who painted them belong to the Giottesque

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school of the Romagna. In general style of composition and colour they follow the great Tuscan master, but at the same time show a character of their own, a freshness and joyousness, a love of outward beauty which betrays a kinship with the early Umbrian and Siennese schools of painting.

There is a fresco on the wall of the north aisle, a Madonna and Child of the same style and period as those in the nave, but the heads have been much repainted. Everywhere on the walls are traces of paintings, from which the whitewash which once overspread them has been partly removed.

The holy water stoups are richly sculptured. And one of the glories of Pomposa is the mosaic pavement. The rich colours, worn by the tread of many generations, are mingled together in delightful designs, in which stags, peacocks, basilisks and other creatures are wrought. In the middle of the floor the mosaic forms a Cross, with the Star of Pomposa and the date of the consecration of the Church—MXXVI. VII MAIL DEDICATA—in the centre. At the west end the Star is repeated again in the mosaic. The Cross and the Star are the two beacons of this old Benedictine temple of civilisation set on the edge of the great waters.

The Campanile was built rather later than the church. An old inscription upon the wall tells that "this tower was constructed in the year 1063 in the time of Alexander the Pope, Henry the King (Henry IV., King of the Romans), Mainardus the Abbot and Mark the Prior, by Atto and his wife Uvilla." All other memory of the founders is lost except this which survives in the midst of the wilderness of dead years, with the great monument which they raised. The tower rises from a base of enormous square hewn stones in nine stories, pierced by openings which increase in number and size as they mount upwards.

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The lowest are but narrow single slits, but above they become graceful, round-headed windows with double, treble, and lastly quadruple lights. All the lights but one have, however, been filled up in each storey at some recent date, and the delicate stone pillars with their sculptured capitals are mostly hidden, except in the topmost, which are left open. Each of the stories is decorated with slender ribs and delicate arcading, above which run bands of terra-cotta moulding, and in the frieze beneath the highest storey the Star and various floral ornaments in marble are framed in the terra-cotta work. A low steeple surmounted by the cross crowns the tower.

It is very worth while to climb up the many stairs which lead to the belfry at the top. From there, gazing out for miles and miles over this strange land, once sea and now but a stiller and greener sea, you realise the primeval world out of which the province of Ferrara has been created. To the east lies the blue line of the retreated Adriatic, and between you and it spreads out a welter of dark earth and shining water, in the midst of which rise out the domes and spires of Commacchio, that salt city over which the Estensi ruled. All around it are the shallow waters where the lords of Ferrara diverted themselves with fishing. The neighbourhood of Commacchio was their favourite haunt for all kinds of sport. The rough bosky morasses were full of wolves, boars, water fowl and wild game of every sort. Alfonso I. in particular was as mighty a Nimrod as he was a valiant warrior, and would come forth into these wilds in the tempestuous autumn, fearing neither miasmas nor cold.

And to the north, having first made out Adria, the ancient Etruscan city from which the Adriatic Sea took its name, and a subject in later times of the Estensi, you may see nearer another famous hunting



## *The Story of Ferrara*

ground, the forest of Mesola, a great stretch of primeval woodland and swamp, haunted still by wild deer, peacocks, pheasants, and other game. Alfonso II., who was an impassioned hunter, used to carry his Court to Mesola every year, and a Ferrarese gentleman named Annibale Romei describes these visits in his Discourses. "At the end of the autumn his Highness betakes himself to the seashore, where, in a forest called la Mesola, he has built a sumptuous palace, the which forest his Highness with a veritably heroic expense has encircled with a wall, which encloses twelve miles. Here different amusements are undertaken in turns, sometimes fishing in the sea, sometimes hunting, and at all these diversions the most serene Duchess with all the ladies and matrons are present. . . . The Court returning to the palace in the evening, the time is passed till the hour of supper in various pleasant pastimes." The Duke would face all weathers for the sake of sport, and the Duchess Margherita was almost as intrepid, but most of the ladies, fearing the rough salt-laden, autumn winds, would remain behind in the shelter of the palace with those cavaliers who were ready to renounce the chase for the sake of their fair company. Gathering together in one of the chambers, they would amuse themselves with discussions on beauty, love, honour, and such high themes, under the command of an elected queen, in the fashion so popular in Italian society in the sixteenth century. Tasso was often one of the company at Mesola and has sung of its delights. The Castle still exists, but has been much modernised. Permission to drive through the forest must be obtained from the present owner.

We must not forget to visit what is left of the monastic buildings, which adjoin the church on the other side to the Campanile. They are now used as barns. In what was once the refectory

## *The Abbey of Pomposa*

there are some very charming frescoes in a better state of preservation than those in the church. They represent : (1) The Last Supper ; (2) Christ enthroned, with the Madonna on his right, the Baptist on his left, and beyond each of them an abbot of the convent ; (3) The Miracle of San Guido, in which the Archbishop Gebeardo is seen, holding up his drinking-vessel and gazing with wonder and reverend awe at the holy abbot. Tradition pretends that Giotto himself visited Pomposa after hearing of its glories from his friend Dante, and that he painted these frescoes. But, like those of the church, they are due to some local artist, very possibly directly influenced by Giotto, who was painting at Ravenna between 1317 and 1320, about which time this refectory was restored and these frescoes were probably done. The German critic, M. Brach, says that this artist takes his types and composition from the master, though he has not quite overcome the Byzantinism of former art. "The dramatic is not his business; he shows in the quietly enthroned and standing figures that his gift is lyric nature." The figure of the Virgin is especially gracious. Her little head, the long simple folds of her ungirt robe, and the stately attitudes of all the figures show in the artist an inherent feeling for reposeful beauty and grace.

The picturesque gothic building on the opposite side of the court is the Abbot's Hall of Justice, or Palazzo della Ragione, built in 1396 by Abbot Bonacorsi, as the inscription upon the façade tells us. The heraldic device of the Abbot appears there beside the Star of Pomposa. The long, low arcade is supported on pillars of various shapes and sizes, and the brick façade is characteristically ornamented with rounds of bright-coloured enamelled pottery. This hall, where the Abbot once sat in state and administered justice to

## *The Story of Ferrara*

the people of his wide domains, like a great temporal prince, has, with the rest of the monastery, lost its glory and come to base uses. Cows inhabit it now and the upper chambers are filled with hay. And into the precincts of the court, which he was wont to cross with his train of ecclesiastics on the way to his place of judgment, sheep run at evening, bleating, and crop the grass which springs up thickly everywhere. Over the green flats beyond, where once his barge sailed upon the waters, a peasant woman passes, with a great white sheep dog, between two banks of pollarded willow trees. A humble pastoral life now ebbs and flows over this ancient seat of learning, over this domain or proud priests, who served God and ruled the kingdoms of the earth at the same time. The ever-renewed beauty of nature has taken the place of that brief pomp and vanity. Earth justifies her ways.

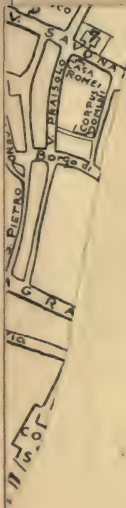


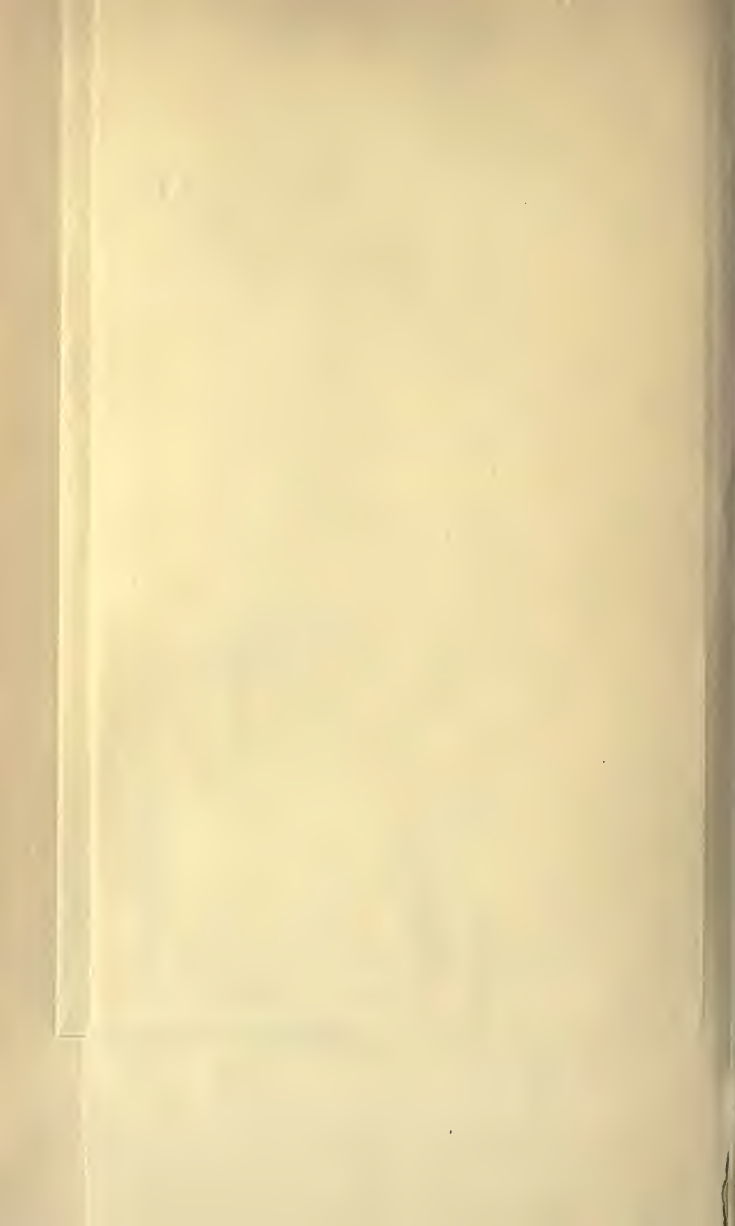
### NOTE TO PAGE 327

A series of portraits of the Dukes of Ferrara has been recently added to the public collections of the city. From what I can learn of them, their historical and artistic value is not great. I learn also, with much regret, that the Santini collection described in the text has been sold and dispersed since this volume was written.









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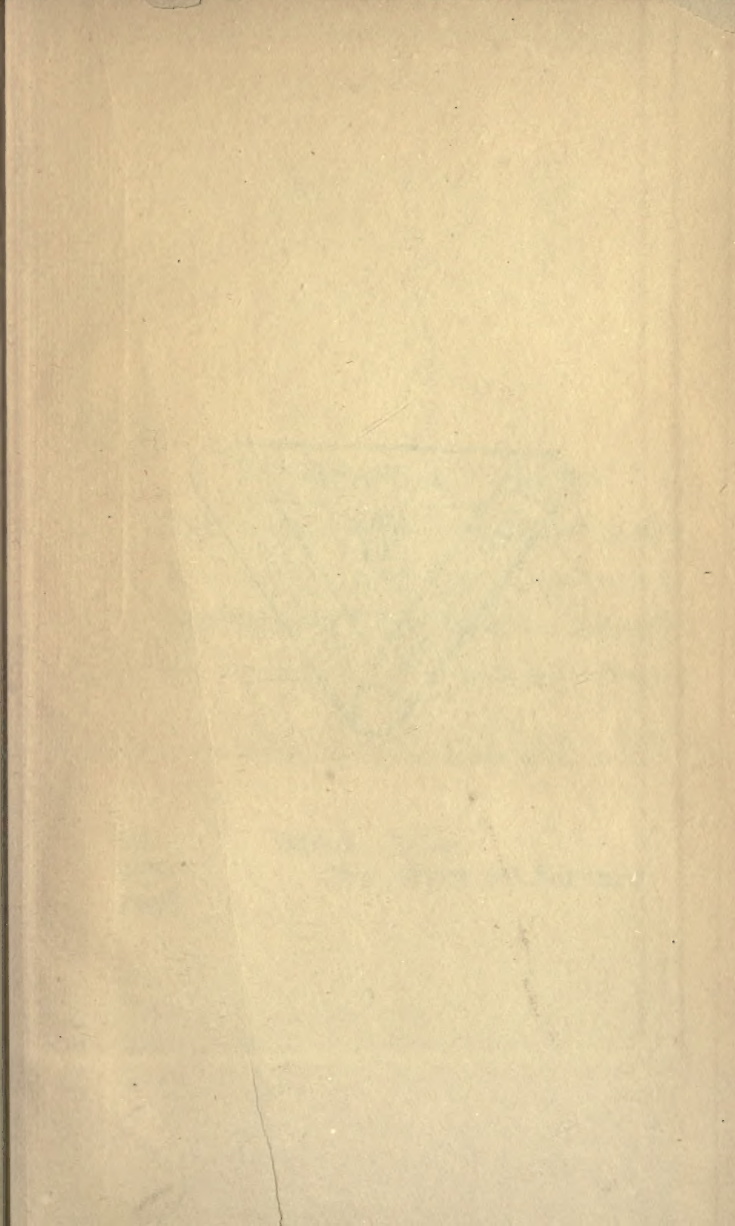
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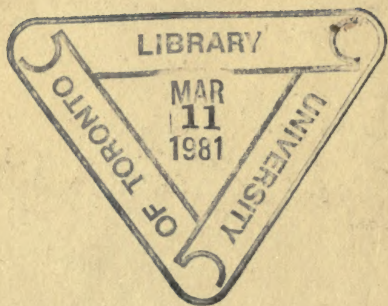
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